

# Truth-Telling At The Centre:

## An Evidence-Informed Co-Design Of A Healing Framework For Koorlangka With Complex Trauma

*“The questions must be, what were the effects on the people as their lands were stolen and desecrated, relationships destroyed, children taken and violated, lore and ceremonies devalued and dishonoured? What long-term impacts have these separate yet inter-related tragedies had on the survivors? Answers to these questions will provide answers to present distressful circumstances.”*

**- Judy Atkinson, Trauma Trails, Recreating Song Lines**

## Suggested citation

Hovane, V., Sellers, L., Pickett, K., Mogridge, R., Pickett, L., Wallum, D., Chan, S. (2023), *Truth-telling at the centre: An evidence-informed co-design of a healing framework for Koorlangka with complex trauma*. Yorgum Healing Services and the University of South Australia, Australian Centre for Child Protection, Boorloo (Perth).

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## Acknowledgements

The authors would like to respectfully acknowledge the traditional custodians of all the lands on which this research was undertaken. We recognise that these have been places of learning, teaching and healing since the beginning of time. We would like to pay our respects to Elders past, present and future.

The authors would also like to thank all those who generously contributed their time and expertise yarning with us for the development of this framework. In particular, we would like to thank the Community Advisory Group members, the dedicated staff of Yorgum Healing Services and all the men and women who participated in the research yarns. We heard your feedback that the yarning was intense, but that you would like more opportunities to yarn together. Our gratitude also to Noongar Mia Mia and Wungening Aboriginal Corporation for their help in recruiting research participants.

This project was undertaken as part of the Pursuit of Excellence in Responding to Child Abuse and Neglect (PERCAN) Project. PERCAN was a partnership between the Australian Centre for Child Protection at the University of South Australia and Parkerville Child and Youth Care Incorporated and was funded by Lotterywest.

## Ethics Approval

This project was approved by the Western Australian Aboriginal Health Ethics Committee (WAAHEC) and ratified by the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC), University of South Australia, protocol number 1069.

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## Terminology and definitions

In the yarning circles, community members were asked about the appropriate language for the report and we have followed their lead by using Noongar words throughout.

*If we're going to start looking at culture as a way of helping our families and children especially, we have to start using that language, our language. This is the word for children – koorlangka. This is the word for this. If you come from that area, that's the name of your group. I think we have to start to use our words and remove it from mainstream language. (women's yarning circle)*

There are different ways to spell Noongar words. For consistency, we have used the Noongar Dictionary compiled by Rose Whitehurst for the Noongar Language and Culture Centre (1997).

**Table 1. Noongar terms used in the report**

Noongar	English
Boorloo	Perth
Boodja	Country
Koorlang	Child
Koorlangka	Children
Manatj Manitj	Policeman
Moort	Family
Moorditj	Hard, Solid
Kaardtijin	Knowledge
Kwop	Good or big, or soft very soft
Moorditj Wern or Wirn	Good spirit, solid spirit
Wadjela	White person, non-Aboriginal person

**Table 2: Background definitions**

<b>Colonial trauma response</b>	The interaction of historical trauma and contemporary trauma. (see Linklater, 2014, p 35)  Trauma that originates outside Indigenous communities, generating a wide range of hurtful behaviours, such as physical or sexual abuse, 'which then began to be recycled, generation after generation inside communities'. (Linklater, 2014, p23)
<b>Complex trauma (Western definition)</b>	Repeated or chronic interpersonal trauma that begins in the developmentally sensitive period of early childhood. (Cook, Spinazzola, Ford, Lanktree, Blaustein, Cloitre et al, 2005)
<b>Culture</b>	'The set of beliefs, values and rules for living that is distinctive to a particular human group. Culture is passed down the generations in the complex of relationships, knowledges, languages, social organisations and life experiences that bind diverse individuals and groups together. Culture is a living process. It changes over time to reflect the changed environments and social interactions of people living together'. (Atkinson, 2002 p ix)
<b>Historical trauma</b>	Sometimes referred to as collective trauma, it is the 'cumulative emotional and psychological wounding over the lifespan and across generations, emanating from massive group trauma experiences' (Brave Heart, 2003)
<b>Lateral violence</b>	'the shaming, humiliating, damaging, belittling and sometimes violent behaviour directed toward a member of a group by other members of the same group... When a powerful oppressor has directed oppression against a group for a period of time, members of the oppressed group feel powerless to fight back and they eventually turn their anger against each other.' (Middleton-Moz, 1999 cited in Linklater, 2014, p 44)
<b>Trauma</b>	Trauma is an event or process which overwhelms the individual, family or community, and the ability to cope in mind, body, soul, spirit (Atkinson, 2002, p xi).  '...trauma is not a disorder but a reaction to profoundly injurious events and situations in the real world, and indeed in a world in which people are routinely wounded.' (Burstow, 2003 cited in Linklater, 2014, p22)

**Table 3: Acronyms**

ACCO	Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation
ACCP	Australian Centre for Child Protection
DCP	Department of Child Protection
EMDR	Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR)
PERCAN	Pursuit of Excellence in Responding to Child Abuse and Neglect
TF-CBT	Trauma Focussed Cognitive Behavioural Therapy
UniSA	University of South Australia
WA	Western Australia

# 1. INTRODUCTION



This report presents community data and findings from the research project: An evidence-informed co-design of a healing framework for Koorlangka with complex trauma. The project was conducted in partnership between Yorgum Healing Services (Yorgum) and the Australian Centre for Child Protection at the University of South Australia (ACCP).

There is limited evidence for how to respond effectively to children and young people who experience complex trauma as a consequence of abuse and neglect, with a lack of therapeutic services for children and young people (Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, 2017). The Australian Centre for Child Protection at the University of South Australia (ACCP) in partnership with Parkerville Child Youth Care Inc were awarded a Lotterywest grant to extend the evidence base in this field. Originally, ACCP intended to trial an existing international treatment approach, for example Trauma Focussed Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (TF-CBT). ACCP staff travelled to the United States to meet with treatment developers and reviewed those treatment models with the most promising evidence for helping children and young people with complex trauma from abuse and neglect. However, when ACCP investigated the evidence claims and the treatment protocols for these models ACCP did not find any to be fit for purpose for children and young people in Western Australia (WA) experiencing complex trauma from abuse or neglect.

ACCP then moved to design a fit for purpose treatment approach and began a process of consultation. In the consultation period, Aboriginal leaders advised the best way to meet the needs of all children, was to design first for Aboriginal children and then adapt this approach for use with non-Indigenous children. Following from this advice, ACCP embarked on an evidence-informed co-design project, based on two-way learning from Aboriginal and Western knowledge about responding to trauma.

ACCP worked under the leadership of an Aboriginal Cultural Oversight Group to establish an Aboriginal led, Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation (ACCO) partnered and culturally governed co-design project. This report represents the community data gathered in the course of the project and now handed back to the Noongar community. A second team undertook systematic reviews on evidenced based treatments for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) such as Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (TF-CBT) and Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprocessing (EMDR), and clinician focus groups to inform the development of a model for non-Aboriginal children. The systematic reviews are available on the ACCP website.

When the project evolved to design for Aboriginal children with complex trauma this changed the evidence base and treatment options from which we were seeking answers. First, we were aware that Aboriginal peoples have their own worldviews and concepts of health and wellbeing (Gee et al. 2014). As the Bringing Them Home Report (1997) noted:

*Traditional Aboriginal culture, like many others, does not conceive of illness, mental or otherwise, as a distinct medical entity. Rather, there is a more holistic conception of life in which individual wellbeing is intimately associated with collective wellbeing. It involves harmony in social relationships, in spiritual relationships and in the fundamental relationship with the land and other aspects of the physical environment. In these terms, diagnosis of an individual illness is meaningless or even counterproductive if it isolates the individual from these relationships.*

Second, First Nations peoples who have experienced invasion and ongoing colonisation have developed their own concepts to describe the impacts of chronic and repeated exposure to traumatic experience. Concepts like historical trauma or collective trauma, defined as ‘cumulative emotional and psychological wounding over the lifespan and across generations, emanating from massive group trauma experiences’ (Brave Heart, 2003) extend beyond PTSD and individual experiences of abuse and neglect.

Third, we note that Western trauma evidence has only recently begun to catch up to knowledge that has been long held by First Nations communities. For example, while Western science has only recently found that trauma can be passed down intergenerationally through cellular memory in our DNA, some First Nations communities have always known about ‘blood memory’, defined as ‘the occurrence of an experience of those who have gone before us being embedded in our physical and psychological being’ (Younging, 2009 cited in Linklater, 2014, p23).

Finally, the Royal Commission into Institutional Child Sexual Abuse had already recommended that Aboriginal communities have access to culturally informed healing methodologies, beyond Western, clinical forms of therapy’ (2017: 78).

In order to co-design an evidence-informed model for healing in this context, ACCP partnered with Yorgum Healing Services (Yorgum) to work with the Noongar community to establish a frame for the community to say what complex trauma from abuse and neglect looks like, how it is experienced in their worldview and what they know to be healing for their children and families. The project had the benefit of a majority Aboriginal research team and oversight from a Community Advisory Group of Noongar Elders. The co-design adopted Indigenous research methods with the team conducting a series of yarning circles with Aboriginal workers employed in Aboriginal community-controlled organisations working with koorlangka and their families who are impacted by complex trauma. Yarning Circles were held over five days between November 2021 and November 2022 on Whadjak and Yued Noongar Country.

The outcome of these yarning circles is a framework for Noongar healing for children and families impacted by complex trauma. The framework provides a set of fundamental, minimum requirement, non-negotiable principles for healing work with Noongar communities which we hope will be useful for community members and their community organisations as well as funders of healing and therapeutic services in the Noongar community.

The report also provides a methodology for genuinely Aboriginal-led co-design which other communities could adapt and refine in order to document their own healing frameworks that are meaningful according to their diverse experiences and cultural templates.

## Report Structure

The report is structured as follows:

### **Chapter 2:**

Introduces who we are.

### **Chapter 3:**

Provides a brief background of the project.

### **Chapter 4:**

Outlines our methodology and approach to co-design.

### **Chapter 5:**

Documents data sovereignty and governance arrangements.

### **Chapter 6:**

Presents short summaries of themes from the yarning circles.

### **Chapter 7:**

Presents the detailed findings from the yarning circles. This chapter includes direct quotes from yarning circle participants and some readers may find this content distressing.

### **Chapter 8:**

Discusses the key limitations of the current research, shares some of the lessons we learned along the way and includes some recommendations for future co-design research.

### **Chapter 9:**

Provides a brief conclusion.

### **Appendix A:**

Provides a set of fundamental, minimum requirement, non-negotiable principles for healing.

## 2. About us



### **Yorgum Healing Services**

The name “Yorgum” is a Noongar name for a large red flowering gum tree which has healing properties. Aboriginal people have used the gum in the treatment of numerous ailments, including diseases of the eyes. The name is an expression of the life sustaining image of the living tree. The deep roots, rising sap, branches reaching to the sky, the shelter given and the home provided to many forms of life – insects, reptiles, bird and other animals. It is a symbol of connectedness and inter-dependence in the diversity of living beings.

Yorgum was established in 1991 by a group of Aboriginal women, some of whom worked in women’s refuges, who were concerned about the lack of appropriate counselling support for Aboriginal people experiencing spiritual, emotional and psychological pain. They founded a service with a ‘healing’ approach rather than an ongoing, crisis-driven ‘patch-up’ approach. Over the years Yorgum has grown in size and scope of its services, to become a well-respected Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation.

### **Australian Centre for Child Protection**

The Australian Centre for Child Protection (ACCP), University of South Australia is Australia’s premier research centre for the prevention of child abuse and neglect, leading a public health approach to child protection research. ACCP’s vision and work is led by the desire to develop a system founded on research and clinical excellence which responds to the needs of vulnerable children and families. ACCP specialises in innovative approaches and solutions, including responding to families with complex and multiple needs, child protection system and service reform and redesign, and the development and implementation of best practice child protection programs and services.

### **The Pursuit of Excellence in Responding to Child Abuse and Neglect (PERCAN)**

PERCAN was an initiative formed as a partnership between ACCP and Parkerville Children and Youth Care Inc and funded by Lotterywest. The PERCAN initiative ran from 2020-2022 with the objective of enhancing knowledge and practice in providing therapeutic responses to complex trauma from abuse in neglect in Western Australia (WA) through new research and evidence-informed workforce development.

Governance of PERCAN was provided by an Executive Steering Group which included representatives from the Department of Communities, WA Police, Department of Justice, Department of Health, WA Country Health, Parkerville, ACCP, WACOSS and the PERCAN Aboriginal Cultural Oversight Group.

The co-design project represents one component of a broader program of PERCAN work. As an Aboriginal-led project, the co-design is unique within the PERCAN research program.

### **The Research Team**

The research team consists of:

- ◆ Professor Victoria Hovane, ACCP (Chief Investigator)
- ◆ Ms Laurel Sellers, Yorgum CEO
- ◆ Ms Kathy Pickett, Yorgum Cultural Advisor
- ◆ Dr Sharni Chan, Research Fellow, ACCP

### **The Community Advisory Group**

The research team was supported in their work with oversight and expertise from the Community Advisory Group made up of the following Noongar Elders:

- ◆ Ms Dawn Wallum, CEO Yorganup
- ◆ Mr Ralph Mogridge, Research Consultant
- ◆ Ms Leonie Pickett, Coordinator Noongar Mia Mia - Moorditj Mia Program

### 3. Background



ACCP and Parkerville CYC were awarded a Lotterywest grant for the PERCAN initiative. The objective was to enhance knowledge and practice in providing therapeutic responses to complex trauma from abuse in neglect in WA through research and workforce development. As part of the PERCAN initiative, ACCP partnered with Yorgum Healing Services to co-design a therapeutic framework for Noongar children and their families affected by complex trauma.

Commencing in 2020, the original intent for this project was to trial an existing international treatment approach with promising evidence for treatment of complex trauma from abuse and neglect. However, detailed investigation of the evidence claims for these interventions for complex trauma and examination of the treatment protocols led ACCP to conclude that none were fit for purpose in their existing form for children in Western Australia. A design project was required that designed for WA children and the WA context.

Having determined that a design project was required, ACCP consulted with Aboriginal experts in WA seeking endorsement to undertake a project which designed first for Aboriginal children and adapted for non-Indigenous children. WA Aboriginal experts confirmed that if PERCAN wanted to create a therapeutic model for children in WA, they should design with Aboriginal children at the heart and then adapt the model for non-Indigenous children.

#### Aboriginal leadership

Effective research with Aboriginal communities must start with Aboriginal worldviews and respect traditional authority structures (Wright and O'Connell, 2015). As PERCAN was a partnership between two non-Indigenous institutions, ACCP could only begin work on an Aboriginal therapeutic model for complex trauma if the relevant Aboriginal community in WA gave their authorisation to proceed and there was Aboriginal leadership at all levels of the project.

In 2021, PERCAN established an Aboriginal Oversight Group, consisting of the following subject matter and cultural experts:

- ◆ Ngarluma, Jaru and Gooniyandi woman, registered psychologist and academic, Prof Victoria Hovane,
- ◆ Noongar man and academic Mr Glenn Pearson, and
- ◆ Noongar man and Parkerville CYC Inc Cultural Advisor, Mr Tony Hansen.

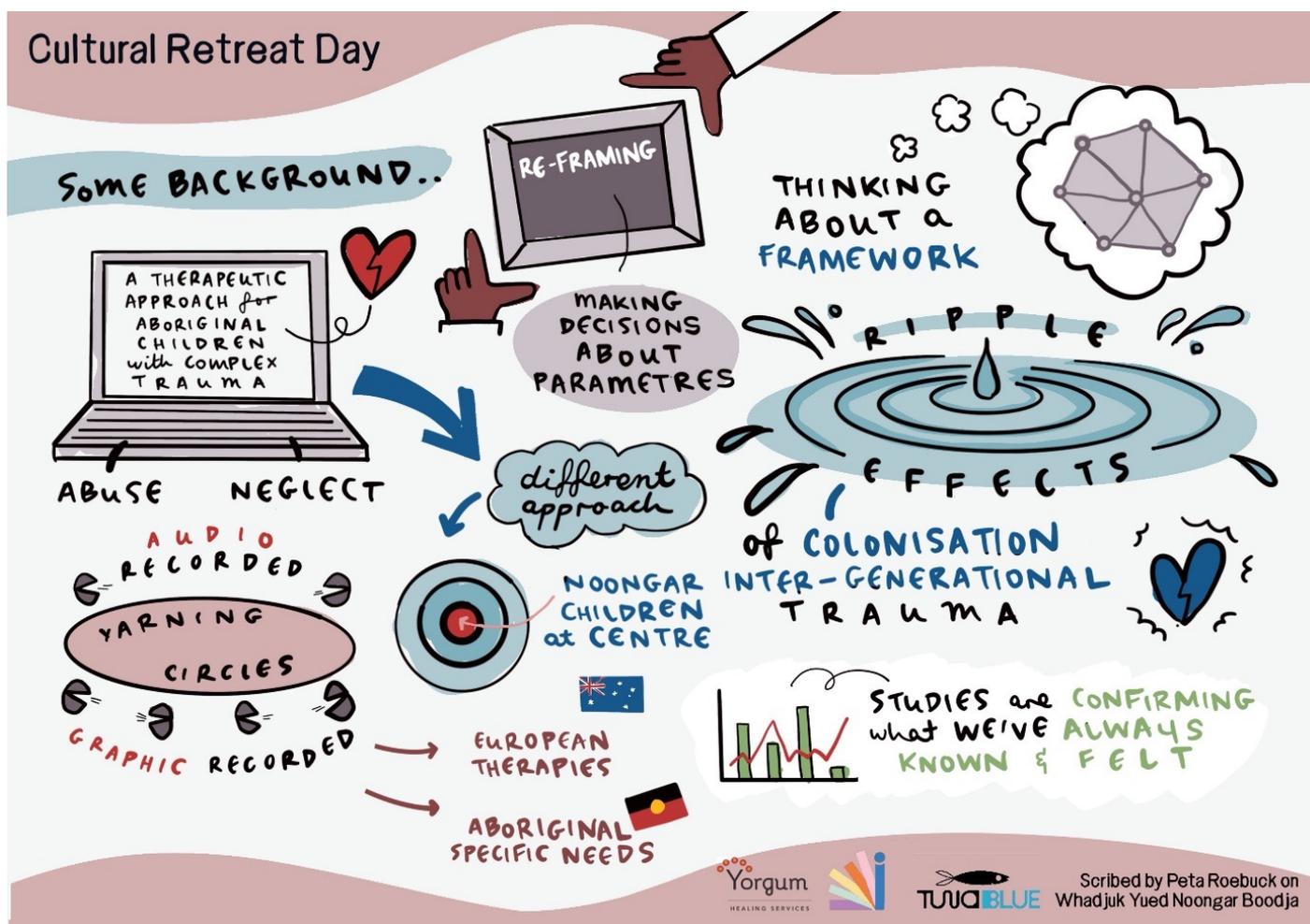
Prof Hovane was engaged as Chief Investigator and Chair of the Aboriginal Oversight Group. Prof Hovane commenced community engagement with two Aboriginal controlled community organisations (ACCOs) who the Aboriginal Oversight Group had identified as having core business in healing, and who had a strong standing in their local Aboriginal community. These two ACCOs were - Yorgum Healing Services (Yorgum) and Pilbara Aboriginal Health Alliance (PAHA). PERCAN was unable to develop a partnership with PAHA because of covid restrictions preventing new research projects in the Pilbara.

Prof Hovane met with Noongar woman and Yorgum CEO, Ms Laurel Sellers on a number of occasions prior to establishing a partnership. During these meetings Yorgum shared significant concerns about losing control over the data collected in their community, of past abuses of Aboriginal knowledge holders, of research institutions and NGOs taking credit for Aboriginal people's intellectual property and using it for their own benefit. Yorgum was understandably hesitant to trust PERCAN given the power difference between the university and a small Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation (ACCO) and the tensions between ACCOs and big NGOs in competition over funding. Ultimately Ms Sellers trusted Prof Hovane, and agreed to partner with PERCAN after assurances from both Prof Hovane and PERCAN that Yorgum would retain control of the cultural and intellectual property and this ownership would be formalised in research protocols and contracts.

Once the partnership between Yorgum and ACCP was established, Ms Kathy Pickett, Noongar woman, Yorgum Cultural Advisor and researcher joined the research team. One of the first things Ms Pickett did was establish a Community Advisory Group consisting of Noongar Elders, Dawn Wallum, CEO Yorganup; Ralph Mogridge, Research Consultant; and Leonie Pickett, Coordinator Noongar Mia Mia – Moorditj Mia Program to provide local level governance.

The research team met face to face several times throughout the year and in between times had virtual meetings fortnightly to yarn, design, plan and undertake the research. The team liaised with the Community Advisory Group in two half-day workshops with email correspondence in between times.

## 4. Methodology



In May 2021, the research team met with Yorgum staff in Boorloo for a full day workshop to co-design the methodology and community engagement protocols. As a result of the co-design workshop, the team developed the following research design:

## Aim

- ◆ To understand the specific dynamics and causes of complex trauma for koorlangka.
- ◆ To design a therapeutic framework that responds to the specific experiences of complex trauma for koorlangka.

## Methods

The team adopted an evidence-informed co-design to understand the specific dynamics of complex trauma for koorlangka and design a therapeutic framework to respond to these dynamics. Genuine partnership with Aboriginal communities in co-design is considered a culturally appropriate way to centre local knowledge, worldviews, ways of working and being, and ensuring cultural integrity in both research processes and outcomes. In the Australian context, genuine co-design is at the heart of good practice approaches in Aboriginal-led research (Wright et al, 2021; Chamberlain et al, 2019; Haynes et al 2019; Scrine et al, 2022).

Evidence-informed co-design brings together the best available evidence, alongside lived experience and practice knowledge. We sought out Aboriginal knowledge of what is healing, developed and refined over tens of thousands of years and now being reinvigorated by Aboriginal communities. As international child trauma expert, Dr Bruce Perry (2015) has argued when referring to Aboriginal people in Australia,

*If you want evidence in this evidence-based world, I can't think of any better evidence than having human beings who survived in the natural world under harsh conditions, for 20,000 generations as being an effective and important set of principles that help them stay alive and help them thrive.*

The team also had access to video resources presenting evidence about trauma from the Healing Foundation and Emerging Minds, as well as videos created by a non-Indigenous clinical team describing Western evidence-based treatments for PTSD and the evidence base for them.



## Data collection

The co-design involved a series of yarning circles between November 2021 and November 2022. Yarning is a traditional form of storytelling and knowledge exchange among Aboriginal peoples in Australia (Bessarab and Ng'andu. 2010). As a research method, yarning facilitates the deep collective exploration of a complex topic in a way that is culturally safe.

Initially, we hoped to invite community members to participate in the research as part of the pre-existing groups they were part of, via the Aboriginal community-controlled organisations (ACCOs) that hosted these groups. We thought that yarning with people in their pre-existing social groups may increase the safety and wellbeing of participants. Community co-Researcher Kathy Pickett yarned with representatives of the ACCOs. During this early engagement work ACCOs provided advice that it was not the right time to yarn with their members about abuse and neglect related trauma and that it would be better to engage Aboriginal people who are employed to work with koorlangka and their moort who are impacted by complex trauma. The research team followed the community's wisdom and recruited participants via emails and follow up phone calls to ACCOs, asking them to invite their staff to the yarning circles. Participation was voluntary and participants could withdraw from the research at any time.

Although participants attended the yarning circles during work hours and with the support of their organisations, participants received a \$250 gift voucher and a care package in the spirit of reciprocity and in recognition that Aboriginal staff are frequently called on to take part in research and consultations in ways that non-Indigenous workers are not.

The first round of yarning circles were held in November 2021 over four days at Noongar Mia Mia. Yarning circles gathered 20 Aboriginal workers in Boorloo who work with koorlangka and their moorts impacted by complex trauma. According to Noongar cultural protocol and the sensitive nature of the research, the yarns were gender segregated and facilitated by senior Aboriginal researchers and counsellors of the same gender. The women's yarning circles were facilitated by Prof Hovane and Ms Pickett, and the men's yarning by Senior Noongar man and research consultant Ralph Mogridge and young Noongar man, Derek Nannup.

Yarning was structured with participant safety as a priority. Yarning respected cultural protocols and included debriefing and shared meals. Noongar Elder Nick Abraham conducted a Welcome to Country and Smoking Ceremony for the men's yarning circles. The men's yarning circles also included dancing and other movement and grounding activities. Prof Hovane, a registered psychologist and Ms Pickett a qualified counsellor were available to all participants both during and after the yarns if participants experienced distress.

In the initial yarns, the researchers suspended pre-existing Western concepts of trauma and complex trauma and held space for participants to frame the issue of childhood trauma from their own experience and that of their communities. The purpose of these yarns was to hold space for Aboriginal workers to determine the parameters of the problem of complex trauma, to decide what it is and what it is not. We wanted workers to be able to tell their story of where the trauma comes from, tell us what they know to be healing, and what a healed child and family looks like. In the words of Māori academic Linda Tuhiwai Smith:

*Reframing is about taking much greater control over the way in which Indigenous issues and social problems are discussed and handled. One of the reasons why so many of the social problems which beset Indigenous communities are never solved is that issues have been framed in a particular way... The framing of an issue is about making decisions about its parameters, about what is in the foreground and what is in the background, and what shadings or complexities exist within the frame. The project of reframing is related to defining of the problem or issue and determining how best to solve that problem. (2012: 154)*

Reframing yarns focussed on the following key topics:

- ◆ The causes and impacts of complex trauma from a Noongar perspective
- ◆ Noongar cultural resources for healing complex trauma
- ◆ Noongar aspirations for healing and identifying what a healed child and family looks like.

Once a Noongar concept of complex trauma and healing was firmly established, the research team facilitated yarning about current Western perspectives on the causes and impacts of childhood trauma and shared information about mainstream therapeutic treatments for complex trauma. Participants viewed short video clips on the current evidence-based treatments for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and how they were being used for complex trauma, for example - Trauma-Focussed Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (TF-CBT) and Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprocessing (EMDR). These videos were prepared and presented by a non-Indigenous clinical team in the broader PERCAN project.

## On Country Yarning, Yanchep National Park

In the first round of yarning circles in Boorloo, participants of both men's and women's yarning circles told us that healing should take place on Country. It was such a strong finding that the team thought the idea of healing complex trauma on Country needed to be explored further. Yorgum and ACCP researchers met to consider options for running further yarning circles, to explore:

- ◆ What it means to be out on Country?
- ◆ What is therapeutic about being on Country?
- ◆ What cultural activities are therapeutic, and why?

The outcome of these discussions was to plan further yarning circles with Yorgum staff as part of an on Country Cultural Retreat at Yanchep National Park in November 2022. We hoped that the experience of being away from the office and out in the bush on Whadjak and Yued Country would provide a reciprocal offering to Yorgum staff who had so generously contributed their expertise and energy to the research partnership and facilitate some reflection on the therapeutic benefits of on Country work with children and their families.

Prior to the yarning circles, participants gathered with Noongar Elder, Derek Nannup taking part in a Welcome to Country and Smoking Ceremony using branches from the local peppermint trees and resin from the grass trees. Participants learned about Noongar culture and Aboriginal science, spent time together walking in the National Park and had a chance to practice spear throwing and boomerang throwing. In the afternoon, the research team shared the preliminary findings and then introduced the new yarning topics:

- ◆ what is therapeutic about being out on Country?
- ◆ what activities happen out on Country and what makes them therapeutic?

## Graphic Recording, Data Analysis and Reporting

The yarning circles were graphically recorded by Will Bessen and Peta Roebuck from Tuna Blue. The use of graphic recording is considered an innovative method to facilitate participant engagement in co-design (see Sandholdt et al, 2022). Graphic recording provides a valuable visual representation of the themes in real time as participants are generating them, enabling participants to elaborate, change or correct the themes as they are being recorded. Traditional Western research methods involve the researchers collecting the data and taking it away for analysis with little participant input or oversight over what is recorded and how their data is interpreted. In this context, graphic recording is important for decolonising research as it restores some agency to participants to control what is and is not recorded, and to determine key terms, concepts and themes.

After the yarning circles, the research team and facilitators met to share the graphic recordings with the Community Advisory Group. As the yarning circles were gender segregated, this was also an important opportunity to share the men's graphic recordings with the female facilitators and the women's graphic recordings with the male facilitators and ensure that the all-female research team understood the themes recorded in the men's yarning circles.

The yarning circles were also audio recorded and professionally transcribed. Prof Hovane designed a coding framework using the graphic recordings to determine what were the primary and secondary themes across the men's and women's yarning circles. The research team then reviewed the yarning circle transcripts line by line to find quotes from the yarning circles to illustrate these primary and secondary themes. As part of our decolonising approach we prioritised the words of yarning circle members and tried to minimise interpretive text. This is quite different to some traditional Western approaches where the voice of the researcher can outweigh the voice of research participants. As yarning circles involve the collective construction of knowledge, quotes are not attributed to individuals, but to the yarning circle. In some cases a single quote may represent the combination of several voices as participants worked together to build up the yarn.

The team then condensed the findings into a set of minimum principles for the development and funding of healing approaches for koorlangka and their families experiencing complex trauma. The resulting framework should not be viewed in isolation from the important contextual information and voices of the Noongar community presented in the full report. The framework is also a living document, and it is likely that the principles will need to be refined over time to keep pace with the rapid pace of cultural reawakening in the Noongar community and developing knowledge about healing of complex trauma affecting colonised peoples. Further research could refine, test and evaluate the framework in preparation for implementation.

## 5. Indigenous data sovereignty

This research conforms to the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATIS) Code of Ethics for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research in upholding the principles of Indigenous data sovereignty and governance. More information about the AIATIS Code can be found here: <https://aiatsis.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-10/aiatsis-code-ethics.pdf>

<b>What is the Indigenous data in this project?</b>	Yarning Circle transcripts Graphic Recordings Butcher's paper notes Community Report
<b>Who owns the data?</b>	Yorgum and the Noongar community
<b>Who holds the data?</b>	Yarning circle transcripts are held on TEAMS in a share file. Yorgum authors (Laurel Sellers and Kathy Pickett) and ACCP authors (Victoria Hovane and Sharni Chan) share access to the data
<b>Which groups of people have authority to access the data?</b>	Yorgum authors and ACCP authors
<b>Which groups of people have authority to use the data and under what conditions?</b>	<p>Any person may cite the Community Report. The correct citation for the report is as follows:</p> <p>Hovane, V., Sellers, L., Pickett, K., Mogridge, R., Pickett, L., Wallum, D., Chan, S. (2023), Truth-telling at the centre: An evidence-informed co-design of a healing framework for Koorlangka with complex trauma, Yorgum Healing Services and University of South Australia, Australian Centre for Child Protection, Boorloo (Perth).</p> <p>Yorgum authors have the authority to use the data.</p> <p>ACCP authors may use the data where they have permission from the CEO, Yorgum.</p> <p>ACCP authors will seek permission from the CEO Yorgum before using the data in any publication or presentation. Yorgum authors and ACCP authors will have the opportunity to be co-authors and co-presenters of any further publications or presentations using the data.</p>

## 6. Summary of themes

### Question 1: What causes complex trauma?

The yarning circles identified the root cause of complex trauma in Koorlangka and their moort as colonisation and the deliberate fracturing of their connections to kin, culture and Country. They told us about the Noongar community trying to reclaim control of their families since colonisation when their roles as parents, aunties, uncles and grandparents were first taken from them - initially by frontier violence, then by the policies that created the Stolen Generations and now by government child protection services. Participants yarned about still trying to reconnect with their kin and culture, having to cope with racism and feeling powerless against government child protection services and other systems such as police, housing and education that exert control over their lives and generate further trauma in their communities.

These causes are explored according to three primary themes - (1) layers of loss and grief (2) fractured connections and (3) layers of abuse. The theme 'Layers of loss and grief' includes five secondary themes - colonisation, genocide, Stolen Generations, suicide, and family deaths. The theme 'Fractured connections' outlines four secondary themes, including fractured cultural knowledge, fractured connection to Country, fractured families and fractured identities. The theme 'Layers of abuse' includes five secondary themes, including racism, systemic discrimination, constant surveillance and judgement, cultural differences misinterpreted, and physical violence.

### Question 2: What does complex trauma look like and how is it experienced?

Participants described observing both negative impacts and positive adaptations related to trauma experiences. These were discussed across two primary themes, including (4) trauma-based adaptive behaviour and (5) symptoms. The primary theme 'Trauma-based adaptive behaviours' includes the following secondary themes: acting out, substance use as a coping mechanism, grief and loss, neglect, homelessness, suicide and self-harm, bullying and lateral violence, toxic masculinity, helplessness and hopelessness, resilience and code-switching.

The primary theme 'Symptoms' is organised into the following secondary themes: deprivation and abuse-based behaviours, presenting with a front, lack of boundaries, problematic social behaviour, family violence, jealousy and lateral violence, identity confusion, accessing pornography, hyperactivity and short attention span, physical symptoms, FASD and other developmental impacts, running away, over-expression, silence and isolating behaviours, and imaginary friends.

### Question 3: What is healing?

As participants identified the fracturing of their connections to kin, culture and Country as the source of trauma, they also identified the need for culture-based responses to healing. Participants wanted healing approaches that focus on rebuilding connections, reawakening pride in a strong Noongar identity, restoring social roles and responsibilities and a sense of belonging. The men's and women's yarning circles emphasised the need to heal the family in order to heal Koorlangka and for their moort to experience safety and stability to have the time and space for the hard work of healing.

Participants felt the most appropriate place for healing was out on Country. Being out on Country itself was considered healing. Being out on Country provides opportunities for cultural connection and belonging: spending time on Country can help to strengthen cultural connections and a sense of belonging, which can contribute to overall well-being and a sense of purpose. Being out on Country hunting, fishing, weaving, and dancing was described as grounding, as was being out in the bush engaging the senses of sight, touch, taste and smell, yarning around the campfire and away from artificial lights and the stresses of urban environments.

The findings about what is healing are presented according to two primary themes (6) Self-determination – have voice and (7) Country is healing. The theme of ‘self-determination – have a voice’ is divided into the following secondary themes: Our mob need to call the shots, family is healing, heal the family to heal the kid, safety and stability, strengths-based approaches, On Country programs, restore pride in identity, yarn about racism, education and learning to pass on Kaardtijin and language, positive life styles – changing the habits our kids see, and teaching our mob to fly.

The theme ‘Country is healing’ includes the following secondary themes: grounding, restoring connections to self, land, people and culture, restoring the body’s systems, restoring a sense of mastery, access to bush foods and medicines.

#### **Question 4: What does a healed koorlang and moort look like?**

For self-determination, Noongar people not only need the space to frame the problem of complex trauma and the solutions, but they also need to be in charge of determining what the meaningful outcomes or signs of success are for them so that healing approaches can align with the aspirations of the community. The findings about what a healed koorlang and moort look like are presented in three primary themes: (8) Strong cultural identity is restored, (9) family stability and safety restored, and (10) hope is restored.

The theme ‘strong cultural identity is restored’ includes the following secondary themes: knowing who you are, feeling complete, knowing about colonisation and its effects, and having a voice, being able to express emotion. The theme ‘family stability and safety restored’ includes the following secondary themes: love and connection, family members understand their roles and responsibilities, families are able to pass on kaardtijin, structure and routine. The theme ‘hope is restored’ includes the following secondary themes: koorlangka are happy, confident and resilient, coming out of survival mode, and drive, aiming for bigger things for the next generation.

## 7. Findings

### 7.1 What causes complex trauma?

Theme No.	Primary themes	Secondary themes
1.	Layers of Loss and Grief	Colonisation Genocide Stolen Generations Suicide Family deaths
2.	Fractured Connections	Fractured cultural knowledge Fractured connection to country Fractured families Fractured identities
3.	Layers of Abuse	Racism Systemic discrimination Constant surveillance and judgement Cultural differences misinterpreted Physical violence

## Primary Theme 1 – Layers of Loss and Grief

Participants spoke about the profound grief and loss experienced by the Noongar community as a result of the historical and collective traumas of colonisation, genocide, and the policies and practices that created the Stolen Generations. Stemming from these original traumas are layers of loss and grief from contemporary traumas, including suicide and the deaths of family members gone too soon.

### Secondary theme 1: Colonisation

Yarning circle participants identified invasion and colonisation as the root cause of complex trauma, beginning the cycle of loss and grief:

*Culture has kept us strong for a thousand generations; kept us connected and had that care and had that love, prior to colonisation - which then destroyed all that. (men's yarning circle)*

*We had traditionally great kin, connection to family and kin. Some people are still doing that in parts of the country. Some of the Noongar mob have been quite – because we are on the south coast - the impact of trauma – or colonisation, has been quite heavy here, so some of our family are disconnected. (women's yarning circle)*

*There's no (acknowledgement) - we weren't there, we didn't cause it ... Get over it. Get over it. Move on. They don't quite understand the impact and the depth of the impact for our mob. (men's yarning circles)*

### Secondary theme 2: Genocide

The men's yarning circles discussed the various ways that colonisation and ongoing colonialism continues to profoundly and negatively impact Noongar people and their families. During the A-Z of trauma activity, they specifically identified genocide as being part of Noongar peoples' experiences. Genocide or the intentional destruction of a people, included the whitewashing of colonial history to eliminate the original stories of Noongar presence and culture, and they referred to graves, symbols of the ancestors they lost in this process.

*Just put erase Aboriginal history.*

*Genocide, 100 per cent.*

*Graves. (men's yarning circles)*

### Secondary theme 3: Stolen generations

Participants spoke about the layers of grief and loss caused by the forced removals of Koorlangka from their moort and communities. Families are still searching for kin and still trying to reconnect. Participants spoke about the ripple effect of trauma passed down the generations from the Stolen Generations - raised without nurturing on the missions and reserves - who in turn struggled to nurture their own children.

*Well, if you look at Stolen gen, if you come from a background of Stolen generation, a lot of their stuff was taken from them. How were they able to express their emotions and feelings when they were shut down? So, then it looks at parenting. They're unable to parent, because they [haven't been parented]. (women's yarning circle)*

*My mum and dad and grandfather and grandmother, when they went to the Mission, a lot of them fellas, they found it very hard to express love for their children...Because they weren't shown it. Because they learnt everything - parenting, love, care - they learnt it from missionaries, who weren't [laughs]...who weren't that good. (men's yarning circle)*

## Secondary theme 4: Suicides

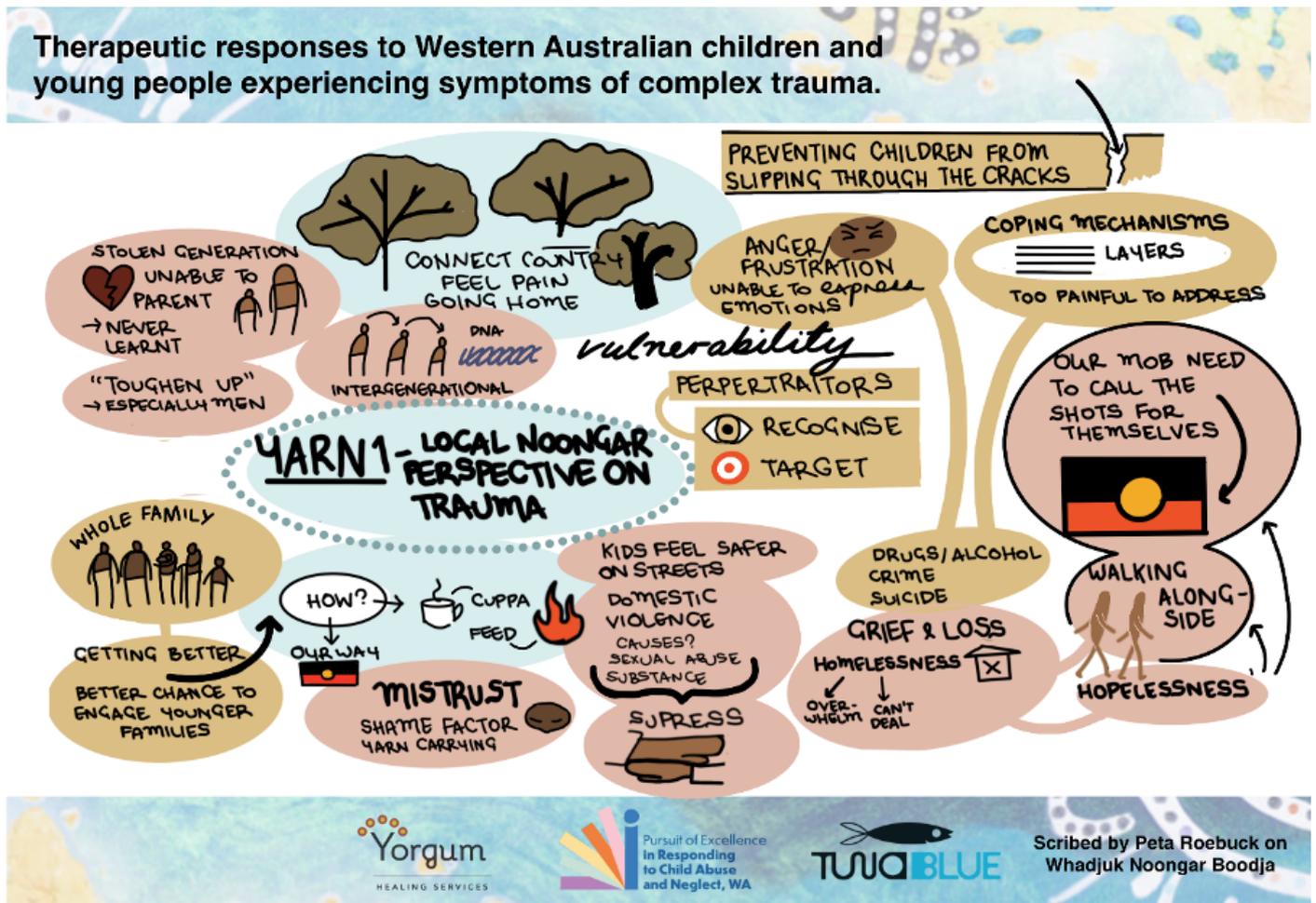
Participants yarned about contemporary experiences of suicide in their community and the grief from these losses.

*Health, death, early death, suicide, whatever. We lose a lot. (women's yarning circle)*

## Secondary theme 5: Family deaths

Women's yarning circle participants yarned about the impact of living in a community who are continually grieving the loss of family members and loved ones. They spoke about family members gone too soon and of the frequency of funerals in their communities. Families do not get the time or space to recover from the anguish of burying one person before having to bury another.

*I think Aboriginal people too, we grieve for so long. I suppose there's lots of losses. When I think about back at home - how many of our poor people especially are just going...I guess, funerals are a thing our young people are being exposed to. I don't know. Somebody bring kids sometimes but they're aware of the loss, the grief. The family are rolling in grief. Our children get exposed to that. (women's yarning circle)*  
*It's on our minds all the time, people that have passed. (women's yarning circle)*



## Primary Theme 2 – Fractured connections

Participants yarned about the importance of relationships and connections and how the fracturing of connections that make up the fabric of Noongar communities is a source of trauma.

### Secondary theme 1: Fractured cultural knowledge

Participants told us their connection to Culture and Country is what connects them to their collective worldview, spirituality and old ways. It is their connection with Culture and Country that reinforces their identity and values of respect and deep listening, teaches them about their roles and responsibilities - their place in families and in the community, and holds them accountable for their actions. Colonisation attempted to break Noongar people's connection with Culture and Country and in doing so deliberately fractured the systems of cultural knowledge that kept Noongar people safe and well for many thousands of years.

*I do believe there is a breach of cultural knowledge we passed on to our children. They don't know dreaming and spirituality and all of that. They know computers, TikTok, YouTube... Facebook. (women's yarning circle)*

### Secondary theme 2: Fractured connection to Country

Colonisation involved moving Noongar people onto reserves so they could not access special places for ceremony and healing, birthing, hunting, as well as the growing and collecting of food and medicines. Connection to country is an integral part of culture and the deliberate fracturing of this connection has had an enormous impact on the wellbeing of Noongar people.

*Because really around the boys' leadership program, classic example, where we went in and sat with the boys and we did the whole introduce yourself, what's your name, who's your mob, where you guys come from? What's your connection to country? None of them could tell me what their connection [was], what mob they were from. (women's yarning circle)*

### Secondary theme 3: Fractured families

Families were fractured when koorlangka were taken away, their names were changed, and families were scattered throughout the state. Colonisation also fractured the cultural knowledge of family obligations, roles and responsibilities, and the consequences of wrong-doing which had been protective of children for tens of thousands of years prior.

*I really think we need to get back to some of our traditional stuff, because we've lost that through colonisation. So, a lot of our family parenting practices are coming from a colonised or traumatic way. So, if our mob were in missions, they never got taught that, so they didn't give that, so that generational stuff can happen, parenting side of it. We should be giving opportunities to our mob to rebuild families... (women's yarning circles)*

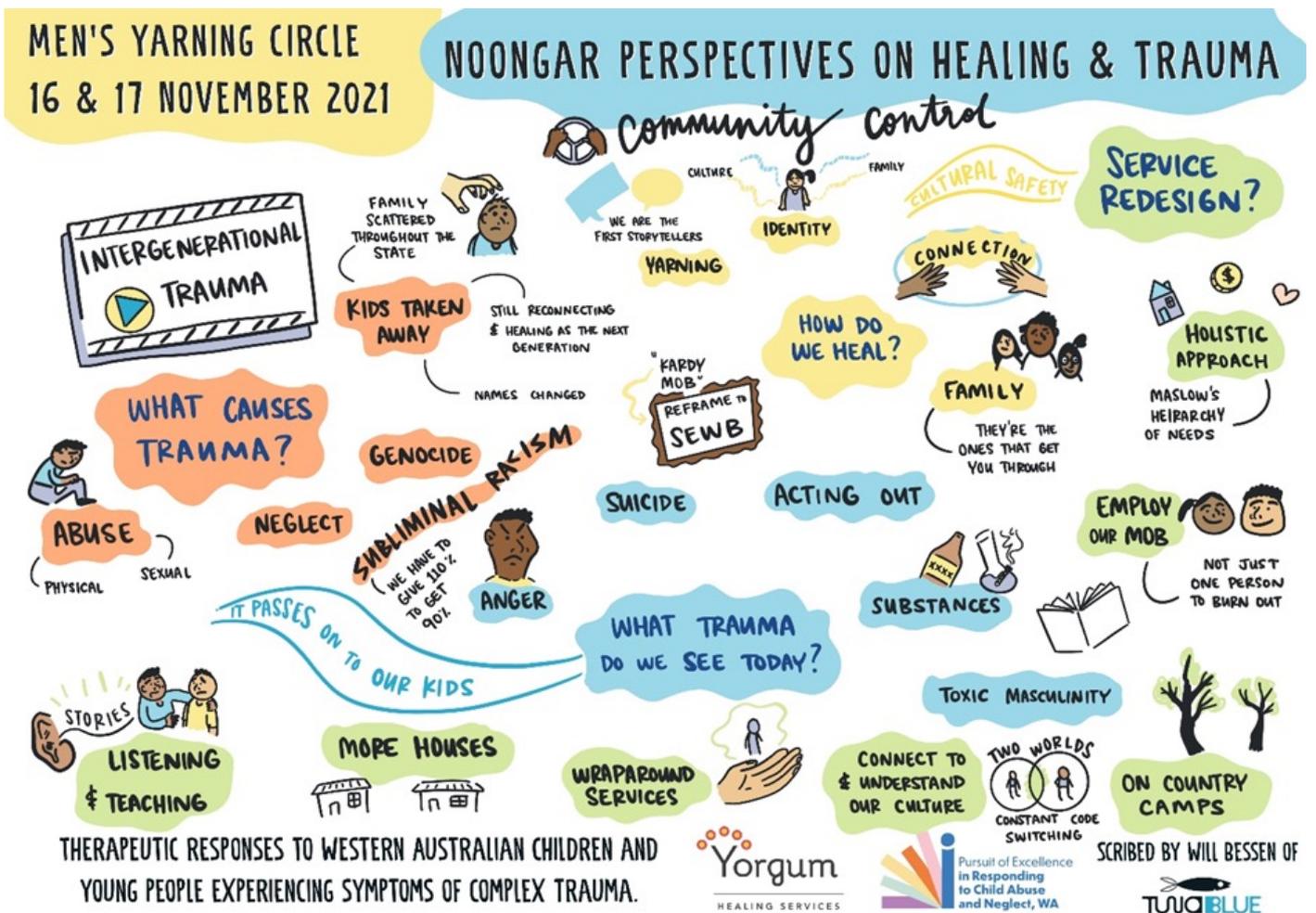
*Western culture came in and the men were sent out to work on the farms and so all the gender roles were switched (men's yarning circle)*

## Secondary theme 4: Fractured identities

Koorlangka were taken away and their names were changed, they were prevented from using or learning their own language and culture. People are still reconnecting and healing from this today.

*Some kids are ashamed to be Aboriginal, to be recognised. They don't know why. Because they weren't taught, culturally, all the language and where they're from and who their mob is from the beginning. So, yeah that's really important. (women's yarning circle)*

*Culture's gone. It hasn't been passed on; they haven't been educated - that's our loss of that self-identity. So, they're shamed. (women's yarning circle)*





Racism is psychologically and emotionally abusive (Bryant-Davis and O'Campo, 2005; Lowe et al 2012; Oates, 2020; Kirkinis et al, 2021). Participants in the women's yarning circle spoke about having to be on constant alert for the threat of racism and the psychological toll it takes:

*Something that we haven't really talked about is those micro aggressions. That just reminded me of, in the racism, anyway, you're always alert for it...I'm tired, I'm so tired, because these things happen all the time... throughout the day there's all these little things just sort of grinding you. (women's yarning circle)*

## **Secondary theme 2: Systemic discrimination**

Participants spoke about systemic discrimination, marginalisation and experiences of abuse perpetrated by the systems they are forced to interact with, particularly police and the child protection system, but also the education system, housing, and employment.

### **Police**

*We make up a huge percentage of kids being picked up by police...We've got police attitudes as well which feed off parliament because of all the stuff that we're not strong in because as I was saying, our mob are easy targets for police because they know we are. (men's yarning circle).*

### **Child protection**

*This is a real source of trauma for our mob now - this Department (Department of Child Protection or DCP) being involved in our lives, and the history of the Department and the history of the Aboriginal people are so connected...So the kids can experience trauma if they experience physical abuse or sexual abuse or they're neglected. But then the way the system responds further re-traumatises. So there's that context, it's not just because the child's experienced the abuse or neglect, it's system responses that are further traumatising and so it's happening at a number of levels and contributing to the complex trauma... I do think it traumatises the whole community, DCP's behaviour. (women's yarning circle)*

*But yeah, you say safety and I go, oh, DCP are going to come in and go, that's not safe, take the child and then all sorts of – all the trauma happens to that child. (women's yarning circle)*

### **Education**

*Those school systems are not our systems, so we are sending our children to places they don't feel like they belong, fit in, part of, or any of those sorts of attachments, and there's a feeling that, for the children, that they should just be black, white or brindle, but they don't have those resources at home that their kid they're sitting next to. So, there's that shame of, well I have nothing I'm Winyarn. We've got nothing. My mum's just a drinker. But you know that kind of - those mainstream systems also reinforce that feeling of shame, of being no one, and you don't really fit in (men's yarning circle)*

*I'm just thinking for instance the schooling system, I think when you're dealing with kids who may be experiencing very complex trauma. All of a sudden, they're thrust into a system that's not equipped to deal with that. Even if an institution say isn't deliberately [trying] to produce trauma, I think it's that [equipped] to deal with that, that may well continue to produce trauma (men's yarning circle).*

### **Employment**

*Because you're Aboriginal, we don't trust you because we know that you're a lazy bastard and we're going to make you work 20 hours before we even offer you a part time position or a casual job...There's some young people that are living in their own homes because they've been kicked out of their family's home through the three-strike rule and had to get up and get in homes at the age of 16 and run these little houses.*

*They're living in poverty as it is. But then you've got the job network provider saying they're going to cut their money if they don't do the job club with Indigenous program. They want to make a dollar. They don't want to do 20 hours work for free. I mean, I know – but being that age, you want to stop the poverty in your head and you'd want to be treated like everyone else. (women's yarning circle)*

## **Housing**

*The government housing system is actually keeping us in poverty. (women's yarning circle)*

*It was like just government housing situation because there's no alternative at the moment because private is hard. Especially if you've never had a private rental and if you're black. (women's yarning circle)*

*I really think that poverty is not something we don't talk about very often in communities. If you're poor and there's actual changes to the brain and everything apparently so I think for our mob we've been poor for so long and there's a sense of shame and anger. Even if we know who we are, there's a sense of anger that, well, hang on, we're the land owners but here we are, we're poor. I think poverty needs to be part of the conversation. (women's yarning circle)*

Yarning circle participants not only experienced systems as abusive to their children and families but observed that there was a whole industry being propped up by keeping Aboriginal people in disadvantage.

*And it almost feels like there's a whole career system built on traumatised children. You know, because in a family - a healthy family setting, all of those things would be done, and for whatever reason they're not done. So, all of those responsibilities of family are given out to different professional people to try and make up for the family breakdown or not teaching the kids love and connection. (women's yarning circle)*

In the context of systems exploiting Aboriginal disadvantage for their own benefit, participants expressed a great deal of frustration that the system sets them up to fail, re-traumatising parents and koorlangka in the process

*One thing that they [DCP] always do is housing. We know how hard housing is so you've already set them up to fail. Plus, they know you need a house before you can get reunification. Well, that looks like about five or six years away because that's how long the waitlist is. They can't get private, so you've already set them up [to fail]. (women's yarning circle)*

## **Secondary theme 3: Constant surveillance and judgment**

Participants spoke about another layer of racialised abuse in terms of being subject to constant surveillance and judgement by neighbours, police, DCP and housing.

### **Neighbours**

*That happened to our niece, she had a big family, a lot of kids, but she had her own stuff, trauma and that, anyway the whole street, the neighbours reported her, and then they formed a group, and she fought it all the way, but she lost. So then she was homeless, all the kids are homeless, she moves into her mother's and then that gets a bit overcrowded, all the bigger kids are farmed out because there's no space, all because that whole street, they just got to - they all banded together to get her out... I really believe that the neighbours have got it all sussed out with racism... (women's yarning circle)*

## DCP

*If you're a DCP child, then you're seen to be at risk of not being a good mum. Those sorts of decisions are being made with our mums when they're pregnant. DCP are circling... like sharks for this child and I don't know how many meetings we've gone into for family and said just back off and give her a chance, give her a chance. (women's yarning circle)*

*All the time, you've got these young 20, 25, 26-year-olds coming straight out of uni with a degree, straight into the Department. Have no lived experience, no possible work experience working with our mob... and here they are sitting at the table as a case worker dictating what these families should be doing to get their kids back. (women's yarning circle)*

## Police

*Police do it on a [daily] basis, our young fellas, we're easy pickings. Easy pickings. Because [manitj] they're going to go over there and start talking, and our mob going to do what? They're going to respond. Negatively. Aggressively. All that sort of stuff. (men's yarning circle)*

*They pipe up...they start swearing. They go to another level. Get angry - what an adult would do. Or they get fearful when they see them [the police]. (women's yarning circle)*

## Housing

*Even down to the three strikes and you're out law. It's targeted because Indigenous people have big families and a lot of them – like with the DCP and all that, the nanas and all that help with the children so it brings a big crowd to the home and you can't – if you're not getting enough income and you're living in government renting, you've got laws there you've got to abide with about family coming and this and that and that's where they need to be educated as well. Where – they can have their family together without breaching these things like government housing and the three-strike rule<sup>1</sup> because the family needs each other to become stronger. (women's yarning circle)*

<sup>1</sup>The 'three-strike' policy for public housing tenants in Western Australia was introduced through amendments to the Residential Tenancies Act 1987 (WA) in 2020. The policy allows for the Department of Communities (which manages public housing in WA) to apply to the State Administrative Tribunal for an eviction order where public tenants have had three notices of breaches of their tenancy agreement within a 12-month period. Critics of the policy include human rights advocates, housing experts and Aboriginal community leaders who argue that the policy disproportionately and unfairly penalises Aboriginal tenants and does nothing to address the underlying causes of breaches, such as poverty, trauma, overcrowding, racism and discrimination while exacerbating existing inequalities in the housing system.

## Secondary theme 4: Cultural differences misinterpreted

Participants yarned about having to deal with culturally incompetent child protection practitioners who cannot recognise important cultural differences in parenting and make judgements about abuse or neglect based on ignorance. For example, the practice of co-sleeping or bedsharing is seen as normal in Aboriginal families (and many other cultures), but not in the dominant Western culture of DCP.

*[From a] Western perspective, they might view – the kids that feel like they wanted to sleep with the foster carer as a symptom of trauma...I know a lot of Noongars do the same. They will drag their mattresses and sleep in the lounge, and they'll have a mattress from one side to the other. They love – there's this closeness, this connection. Everyone feels safe because they're all together... It's understanding that cultural perspective and cultural norms, rather than just interpreting it or making assumptions. (women's yarning circle)*

In another example, the men's yarning circle discussed cultural differences around early autonomy and 'risky' play being misinterpreted by schools and DCP as signs of abuse or neglect.

*He went to his cousin's house and they were play fighting and yeah, he said something like that at school and DCP were straight on our backs. Like that was just a simple – kids just playing around. Yeah, still – still that control. Yeah, just was a bit upset about that... you can't take control of the situation as parents yourselves. Same as the old days. If they had a bit more of an awareness of how Aboriginal kids are maybe it would have been a bit different. (men's yarning circle)*

## Secondary theme 5: Physical violence

Participants spoke about experiences of physical violence as abuse, and these experiences ranged from the historical violence of settlers killing Noongar people through to contemporary violence and the ways in which this violence has been recycled into families and communities over several generations.

Historical physical violence:

*He was taken when he was five and he spent 12 years there [on the mission]. Of course, a lot of your grannies, grandfathers, grandmothers might have been in there as well. But discipline was very hard. It was violent. It was very, very aggressive. They had big belts, leather belts like this big that they would actually belt the kids with. Dad, as I said, he was taken away at five, five years old. He spent seven years there. When he first got there, he hated it. Hated it and he ran away. In about two weeks he ran away about three times. Got belted. On the sixth time when they caught him, they actually put a four by two between his ankles and smashed his ankles so they hobbled and they smashed his ankles, broke both his ankles. (men's yarning circle)*

Violence brought from the missions into some families:

*So it was all very, very violent forms of love and parenting and that sort of stuff [on the mission]. We used to get belted. Some people, we still belt our kids, because that's all that we know, because we don't know how to create that environment for them where they're going to feel safe and they're going to feel loved. (men's yarning circle)*

Sexual violence brought from the missions into some communities:

*He was [sexually] abused. Then he grew up in [the mission] and started doing it to younger ones. He said it was rife - the adult to the child and child to the smaller child and then on and on it went, then that came back into our communities. So it didn't come from us I don't think, it came from colonising practices. (women's yarning circle)*

## 7.2 What does complex trauma look like and how is it experienced?

Theme No.	Primary themes	Secondary themes
4.	Trauma-based adaptive behaviour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Acting out</li> <li>Substance use as a coping mechanism</li> <li>Grief and loss</li> <li>Neglect</li> <li>Homelessness</li> <li>Suicide and self-harm</li> <li>Bullying and lateral violence</li> <li>Toxic masculinity</li> <li>Helplessness and hopelessness</li> <li>Resilience</li> <li>Code-switching</li> </ul>
5.	Symptoms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Deprivation and abuse-based behaviours</li> <li>Presenting with a front</li> <li>Lack of boundaries</li> <li>Problematic social behaviour</li> <li>Family violence</li> <li>Jealousy and lateral violence</li> <li>Identity confusion</li> <li>Accessing pornography</li> <li>Hyperactivity and short attention spans</li> <li>Physical symptoms</li> <li>FASD and other developmental impacts</li> <li>Running away</li> <li>Over expression</li> <li>Silence and isolating behaviours</li> <li>Imaginary friends</li> </ul>

### Primary theme 4: Trauma-based adaptive behaviours

Participants of the yarning circles spoke about a range of different adaptive behaviours they observed in koorlangka coping with complex trauma. This included both negative adaptations, for example acting out or substance use when the layers of trauma are too painful to address, as well as positive adaptations such as signs of resilience in the face of trauma.

The men's and women's yarning circles observed a range of impacts of complex trauma that reflect a loss of the traditional ways of coping and expressing emotion. Without access to cultural ways of expressing emotions and trusted Aboriginal people in their lives to express their pain and hurt, participants told us 'a lot of the kids, they mask their trauma with different means of coping' (women's yarning circle).

### Secondary theme 1: Acting out

Both men and women in the yarning circles observed that when koorlangka do not have the opportunity for expressing their pain and frustration in healthy ways, it was common to see them express their trauma by acting out, which in turn made them bigger targets for the juvenile justice system.

*I suppose it's expressed through behaviour, like trauma. Complex trauma working where we're working, it's - we see all the anger - then once you unpack all that, it's that trauma that's behind it. It's so complex, that behaviours are - even kids, they can't actually communicate with us but through behaviours. (women's yarning circle)*

*I've seen children become destructive. Smashing things. Hitting things. (men's yarning circle)*

*Boys are aggressive or violent, maybe reacting to trauma. (women's yarning circle).*

## **Secondary theme 2: Substance use**

Another common theme was the use of substances as a way of coping when the layers of trauma were too painful to address. Women's yarning circle participants describe seeing koorlangka who 'cannot actually communicate with us', 'they don't know how to show emotions. They only show emotion through drugs and alcohol, that expresses everything out', '...they don't know how to express it' (women's yarning circle).

*I do feel that the meth epidemic has really kind of wiped out a whole generation of our mob...and that is trauma-based, it's coming because they're so traumatised (women's yarning circle)*

*It is kind of all connected, our mob that grow up with abuse and neglect, trauma, then start medicating - self-medicating to feel better or cope and then that becomes their problem and then end up in prison. (women's yarning circle)*

## **Secondary theme 3: Grief and loss**

When colonisers prohibited the practice of ceremony, they took away First Nations peoples' way of resolving grief (Linklater, 2014 p35). The women's yarning circle yarned about the magnitude of unresolved grief and loss in the community and of the destructive coping mechanisms people had to use to manage so much pain.

*That's what I find about a lot of our mob that come through from grief and loss. It's just they don't know what to do. Then they result in alcohol abuse, drug abuse, whatever it might be. But they just hadn't learned. Or they don't understand the stages or haven't got the strength to be like, okay, well this is how I should be. So, we find we do a lot of work around grief and loss. Three of the girls that are here, that's their sole role in the organisation. Our wait list for that is huge, massive. (women's yarning circle)*

*Well, I think it's grief. I've seen young ladies lose their mother and they've just jumped in the arms of a man to save them so they don't become lonely, and they're getting abused in that relationship... and then they're not getting treated right in that relationship, but they feel that's all they have since they've lost that person. So, they stay in it for a very long time. It is grief, because she doesn't know how to cope and deal with that. So, she's reaching out seeking for love and attention and affection in the wrong way, but the older man is also taking advantage of that young girl's vulnerability... Then that's another form of trauma. (women's yarning circle)*

A recurrent theme in the yarning circles was the grief experienced by so many of their koorlangka removed from their moort by the Department.

*It will be like grieving for them if they're ripped out of their mother - even all that's what's going on, it would be like a - they'll go through their grieving process and fretting process because they always will love their mother, that's unconditional, it's from the womb, and to leave them and get ripped out without your consent or the mother's consent, that child is - there's more damage is getting done to that child because the whole time they're going to be pining for the mother and the father or other siblings or whatever.*

*So they're pretty much really damaging that child emotionally too... (women's yarning circle)*

#### **Secondary theme 4: Neglect**

Participants spoke about neglect in their communities and how this happens because of the original traumas of colonisation, of people being stolen from their own families, of being raised harshly in the missions and reserves and never having the opportunity to learn traditional Noongar parenting.

*Basic parenting skills. Positive parenting skills. You'd think we'd all have it, but because of colonisation, removals, all that stuff, not a lot of our Elders and our parents and grannies - they didn't have a wide range of parenting skills. (men's yarning circle)*

#### **Secondary theme 5: Homelessness**

For some koorlangka, one way of adapting to the trauma of domestic violence, substance use and/or sexual abuse occurring in the home was to live on the streets and seek safety there.

*I think a lot of the kids go out on the streets looking for attachments, and then you find the 10- and 11-year-olds hanging out with 18, 19 year olds and they form their little groups - family, that's what it is to them. So, they go out of the house and they look for it somewhere else. I believe the young fellas do look for attachments...It's an adaptive behaviour - because they don't have it, so how can they find that connection that they're looking for? (women's yarning circle)*

*I find that young fellas on the streets are very independent streetwise. Like they've been out there for a very long time, at a young age, and those are the ones that I find that's gone through trauma, running from DCP. They're very streetwise and independent. (women's yarning circle)*

Participants also spoke about the number of clients they see who are unhoused because coping with the overwhelming grief and loss from DCP removing their children leaves them with few resources for maintaining employment or tenancy.

#### **Secondary theme 6: Suicide and self-harm**

Participants spoke about koorlangka who coped with their experiences of trauma through 'suicide ideation' (women's yarning circle) and 'cutting their hair, cutting themselves, hurting themselves' (men's yarning circle), 'sniffing petrol (women's yarning circle)

*So yeah, I mean I don't understand the cutting, but I've been told it helps them to feel. So then Western is all about the mind, we're not talking about feelings, you know what I mean? ... So maybe those people are in that frozen state of the fright/flight freeze and they just don't feel nothing and so there's that cutting just to feel something. (women's yarning circle)*

#### **Secondary theme 7: Bullying and lateral violence**

Participants spoke about bullying and lateral violence as an adaption to trauma, of koorlangka not feeling good about themselves, feeling shame and being made to feel inferior and this being expressed as lateral violence in their communities. Participants observed this in koorlangka as 'bullying on social media' (women's yarning circle).

*Well, I think it comes from feeling not good enough, insecure...no confidence, maybe they were told, that growing up in a trauma situation. I think that's where that emotional abuse comes into this. When you don't have that confidence within yourself. (women's yarning circle)*

*They think they're not good enough. They're ashamed of their culture or who they are. To me that's that colonial practice of saying you're a black piece of shit, and from then. That's still said in different ways now. (women's yarning circle)*

Participants also explained that lateral violence also occurred when people did not know their roles and responsibilities in the kinship system.

### **Secondary theme 8: Toxic masculinity**

Participants spoke about the disruption to Noongar kinship roles and responsibilities that occurred from the time of colonisation and how some Noongar people have adapted to this by taking on patriarchal gender relationships from the dominant culture, including toxic forms of masculinity

*Within our Country, we are a matriarchal Country, as soon as that Western patriarchal society hit our shores, Noongar men were given the power - or whatever little power we had - and women were disregarded. Then toxic masculinity came over and then women were left out of the conversations, and I suppose it all started from there. (men's yarning circle)*

*Toxic masculinity, where Western thinking is that women should be seen and not heard. Us and matriarchal societies, it was our women that were our boss. Not our bosses, but they had the authority. They were our bosses. (men's yarning circle)*

*They're getting their ideas of masculinity from the dominant culture - they're getting it just from the music or movies or this and that, the internet too. (women's yarning circle)*

*Even a lot of the young fellas look up to Americans, the rappers, and all this and that. That's how they demonstrate, like they'll act out. Say, if they're talking about sex and women and swearing about them - that's their role models. Their girlfriends are - they're pimping them out. You know the songs you hear? They think that they're running the show and the women have to do what they got to do. (women's yarning circle)*

Men's yarning circle participants spoke of the ways in which toxic masculinity limits the range of options available for young men to cope or express their pain in healthy ways.

*I know my father said - he's always said, that's a weakness, he sees it as a weakness - showing your feelings. (men's yarning circle)*

### **Secondary theme 9: Helplessness and hopelessness**

Women's yarning circle participants observed that dealing with constant trauma and chronic experiences of injustice can be so overwhelming that people become immobilised. When this happens they cannot cope or manage the trauma at all – they feel helpless and hopeless.

*Mothers just feel the bitterness and that sad about having to leave their child after one hour (of DCP contact visits) so they're going to go, I can't go through this anymore. I don't want to go through this. It's that constant grief...of losing them all over again. Then you wonder why people give up. Some of the clients we go to support, it's like, I would have gave up too. Because they just put them through so much. (women's yarning circle)*

Participants yarned about mob being trapped in survival mode and unable to think about dealing with the trauma.

*Is it more like – they have more pressing issues like whether you've got a roof over your head...some tucker, some food and that's occupying people's minds, never mind the healing...They're surviving. (women's yarning circle)*

## **Secondary theme 10: Resilience**

Participants also observed adaptations to trauma that reflected resilience, including the ability to bounce back after set-backs and developing healthy coping strategies such as exercise.

*Well, our families and our young people and our families or whatever, they've obviously built resilience for so many things. They're survivors, so that's them. The big one... We fall down, but we all manage to get up. Maybe it'll take a week or two [laughs] or [whatever], we get up. (women's yarning circle)*

*When our kids fall, not physically, but just fall down that they have the capacity to get up and keep going and not just give up and give in. (women's yarning circle)*

*Yeah. And healthy coping mechanism as opposed - or is that like being able to think that through and go, okay, I feel like crap. I'm not going to go and get drunk; I'm going for a walk. (women's yarning circle)*

## **Secondary theme 11: Code-switching**

Women's yarning circle participants spoke about their koorlangka and their skill in navigating two worlds – both Noongar and Western. Participants saw this as a positive adaptation to trauma. At the same time, they also recognised the requirement to constantly code-switch as another layer of stress and strain.

*Talk black fella, then we start talking flash again, you know? Switch it.*

*They call that code switching.*

*Code switching.*

*All day, every day and it's really exhausting.*

*So, if it's an Aboriginal service, then you can be [yourself]. Then we still have to go the meetings and the wadjelas and walk that side of things.*

*Yeah, code switch again. (women's yarning circle)*

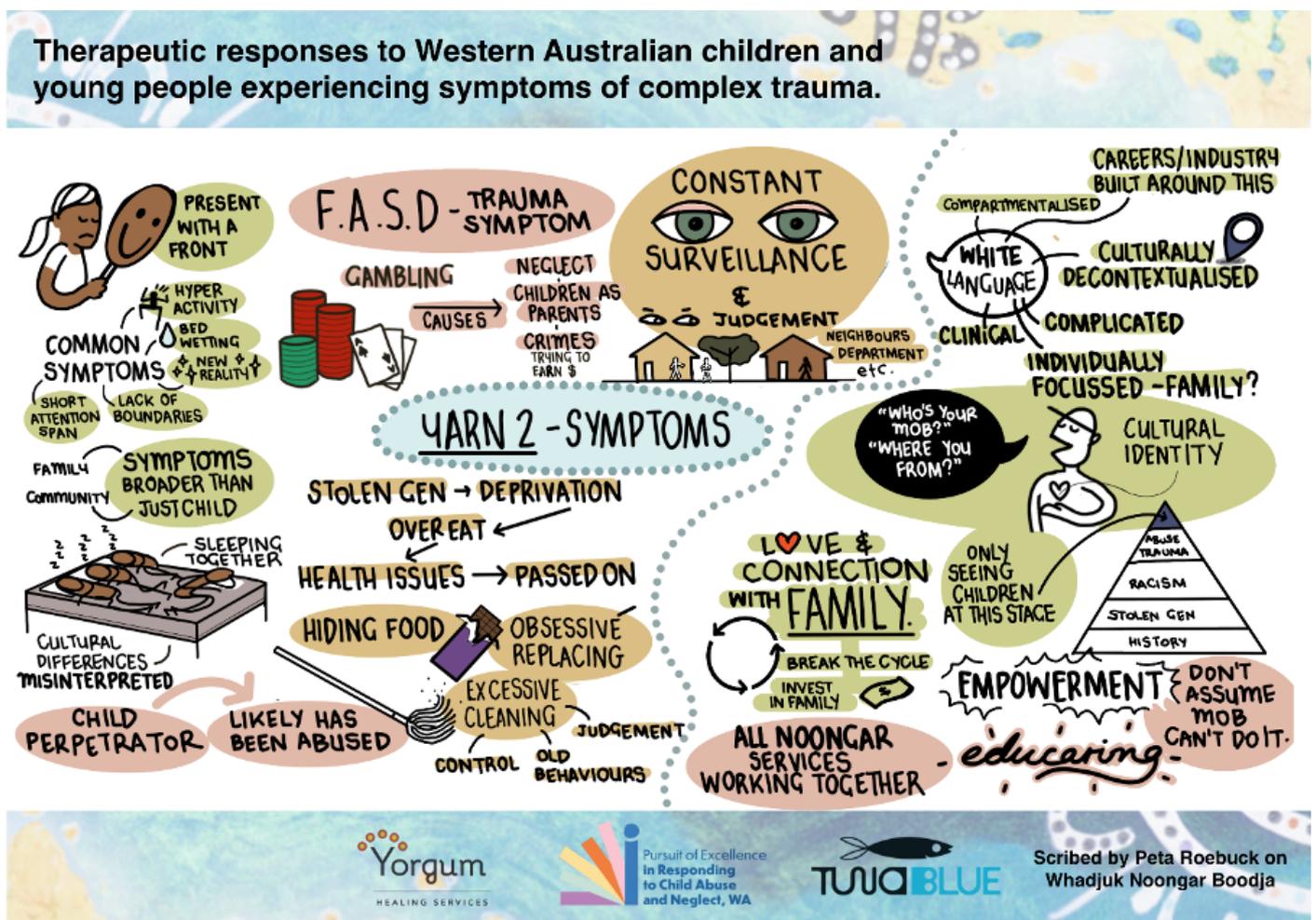
## Primary theme 5: Symptoms

### Secondary theme 1: Deprivation and abuse-based behaviours

Participants described seeing symptoms of complex trauma linked to the experiences of the Stolen Generations, including deprivation causing overeating or hiding food, obsessive replacing, excessive cleaning, involvement in crime trying to earn money, gambling and addiction.

*But a lot of that was impacted through his parents gambling. So, for survival for them to eat, they needed to steal to survive. Then that became more problematic, as in drug use and all that kind of – you know, continued... Because there was nothing in there, they had to resort to these behaviours. (women's yarning circle)*

*It could be just as easy as gambling. Yep. Poor little kids try to solve the problem of not having food or things like that. Or clothes, yeah. To be like everyone else. (women's yarning circle)*



### Secondary theme 2: Presenting with a front

Women's yarning circle participants observed koorlangka with complex trauma as sometimes presenting with a front.

*You know how they say for child sexual abuse, that it will sit and manifest for 20-odd years before you can actually speak about it. I heard that somewhere and I wondered too if children – you know when children are even in the worst situations, they smile or, you know, I don't know. They look happy, even though they're probably unhappy or they're just not – it hasn't come forward yet or something. (women's yarning circle)*

### **Secondary theme 3: Lack of boundaries**

Sometimes, complex trauma showed up in koorlangka as a lack of boundaries.

*I think in school, the eldest one, they wanted to teach him about boundaries because apparently, he didn't understand boundaries. He'd be all over other kids, hitting them or whatever. So, they wanted to try and teach him how to do that...It's a normal thing up here, though. The kids. Yeah, they don't have anything. They're just free. Do what they want and...No one really pulls that up. (women's yarning circle)*

### **Secondary theme 4: Problematic social behaviours**

Women's yarning circle participants spoke about problematic social behaviours as signs of koorlangka with complex trauma. They observed behaviours such as young people engaging in sex in exchange for things they need such as drugs, money and food.

*The young girls, the truckies go by, 13 years old, you know, they want money so they know how to get it. (women's yarning circle)*

*Behind shopping centres..young girls selling themselves for gear or 20 bucks. They got all bungee mans - all wadjela bungee mans bribing young girls around you see at Mirrabooka Square... you can see what's going on (women's yarning circle)*

*But I think there's a lot of young, homeless youth that actually - women, both girls and the boys that both do it to survive, it's a part of their survival of being able to get substance if they're on that, but also food and whatever they want, you know. (women's yarning circle)*

### **Secondary theme 5: Family violence**

Both men and women's yarning circles yarning about family violence as a sign of complex trauma in the adults who use violence as well as the adults and children who experience family violence.

*I guess family violence is - it is a great result of colonisation again, and it impacts on families in many many ways. I've heard people talking, and I somewhat agree, in terms of violence as a result from not having the opportunities to develop strong relationships, loving relationships and all that sort of stuff. Again, it becomes about power and control and of course when we have that in our families we also pass it down, unintentionally. I don't excuse domestic violence, family violence, in no way shape or form, but at the same time, these relationships and how people relate to each other is all that they know. It's as far as their knowledge goes to and they feel that they have to do this sort of stuff, they don't know any other way of dealing with conflict within families. If there's drugs and all that sort of stuff, that conflict becomes a whole lot worse. (men's yarning circle)*

*Well, it's not our way that's for sure. Neither is all the abuses. Again, it's a learnt behaviour from colonisation... That's where it's come from. (women's yarning circle)*

### **Secondary theme 6: Jealousy and lateral violence**

The women's yarning circle identified jealousy and lateral violence as signs of complex trauma. The women talked about jealousy or more specifically 'jealousing' as part of the story of family violence for people who have not had the chance to develop a strong sense of self or belonging and who feel insecure.

*Well like, with family violence, you know like people, sometimes it's the men but also the women. You can't work with a woman if their man's around. I've noticed one lady who I work with, she's very possessive when it comes to her bloke...Even at the shopping centres, girls are hitting their mans while, you know, you're doing shopping and - you dumb black dog - and all this and that. (Women's yarning circle)*

### **Secondary theme 7: Identity confusion**

The women's yarning circle observed that sometimes they see sexual identity confusion as a symptom in boys and young men who have experienced sexual assault.

*I think that what we do see is a lot of confusion. If the child was a boy and was sexually abused, that creates a lot of confusion for them and their own identity. Sexual abuse just by nature, just strips away everything. (women's yarning circle)*

### **Secondary theme 8: Accessing pornography**

Women's yarning circle participants yarned about seeing children who have easy access to pornography or having been shown pornography as a sign of complex trauma.

*They have access to porn so that's another one. (women's yarning circle)*

*Social media and the internet. Yeah, and being - and taking photos of themselves and sending it and then that gets distributed. (women's yarning circle)*

### **Secondary theme 9: Hyperactivity and short attention spans**

The women described hyperactivity as a symptom of complex trauma, observing that some children who came into their services had a lot of difficulty with self-regulation and short attention spans.

*We've seen kids coming in highly traumatised and they literally run around touching and screaming. They can't - what's the word? Self-regulate. So, there's a lot of that we see. (women's yarning circle)*

*So, we have kids that come in for counselling and my god, they're just bouncing off the walls, you know? (women's yarning circle)*

### **Secondary theme 10: Physical symptoms**

Both men's and women's yarning circles told us that children who have experienced chronic forms of trauma may show physical symptoms of stress and distress, such as wetting the bed or having bellyaches in the short term and chronic health problems in the longer term.

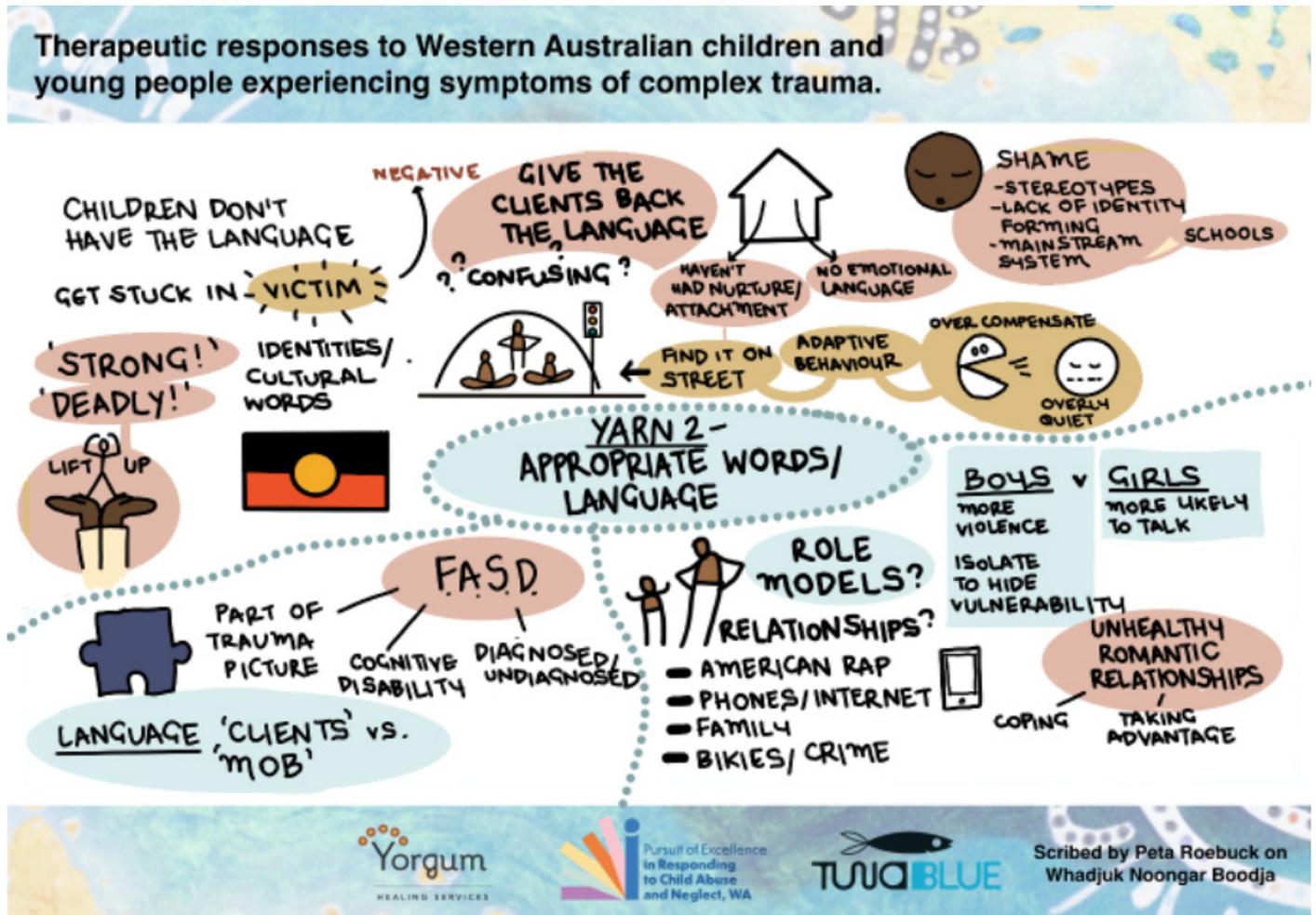
*With the neurological changes, the impact, it affects our way and when we're experiencing trauma, we've got high levels of stress or cortisol in our bodies. It affects every part of your body, physically, psychologically, as well as physiologically as well. It's responsible for - also a lot of the trauma is responsible for a lot of the health conditions currently in our community. Things like diabetes, cancers, high blood pressure, all that sort of stuff, direct result from the trauma that's been experienced and our body's being unable to process the cortisol levels in our bodies. (men's yarning circle)*

### **Secondary theme 11: FASD and other developmental impacts**

The women's yarning circle yarned about FASD - both diagnosed and undiagnosed - as part of the picture of complex trauma in their communities, of substance use as a coping mechanism for trauma and the passing on of this trauma to the next generation in the womb.

So, mum drank a lot, and she was struggling. She could have been a victim of DV, she could have had her own traumas. Everything comes in utero from birth. Not even from birth, from utero, from the beginning. What we experience as mothers is passed down through our children. There's not a lot of info on FASD either for young mums or anyone, any mums to understand. I didn't even know it was a thing until late.

The men's yarning circle also saw complex trauma in the appearance of - 'Learning development delays. Especially if it's in the childhood, like the important stages. You'll see it in the development'.



## Secondary theme 12: Running away

Both men and women yarned about koorlangka 'running away' (men's yarning circle) 'she's already running away' (women's yarning circle) from their placements in OOH, running back home to their families, trying to get back to Country, trying to avoid being placed in group homes.

## Secondary theme 13: Over expression

Participants said another sign of complex trauma was koorlangka being overly expressive, of searching for attachment where ever they could find it.

*You can have someone that is so overcompensating, that they are so outgoing and really driven to make friends and really outspoken, because they are trying to fill that void of not having something. (women's yarning circle)*

## Secondary theme 14: Silence and isolating behaviour

In contrast to koorlangka who might display overly expressive behaviour, yarning circle participants spoke about boys in particular who retreated into 'silence' and 'isolation' trying to hide their pain (men's yarning circle).

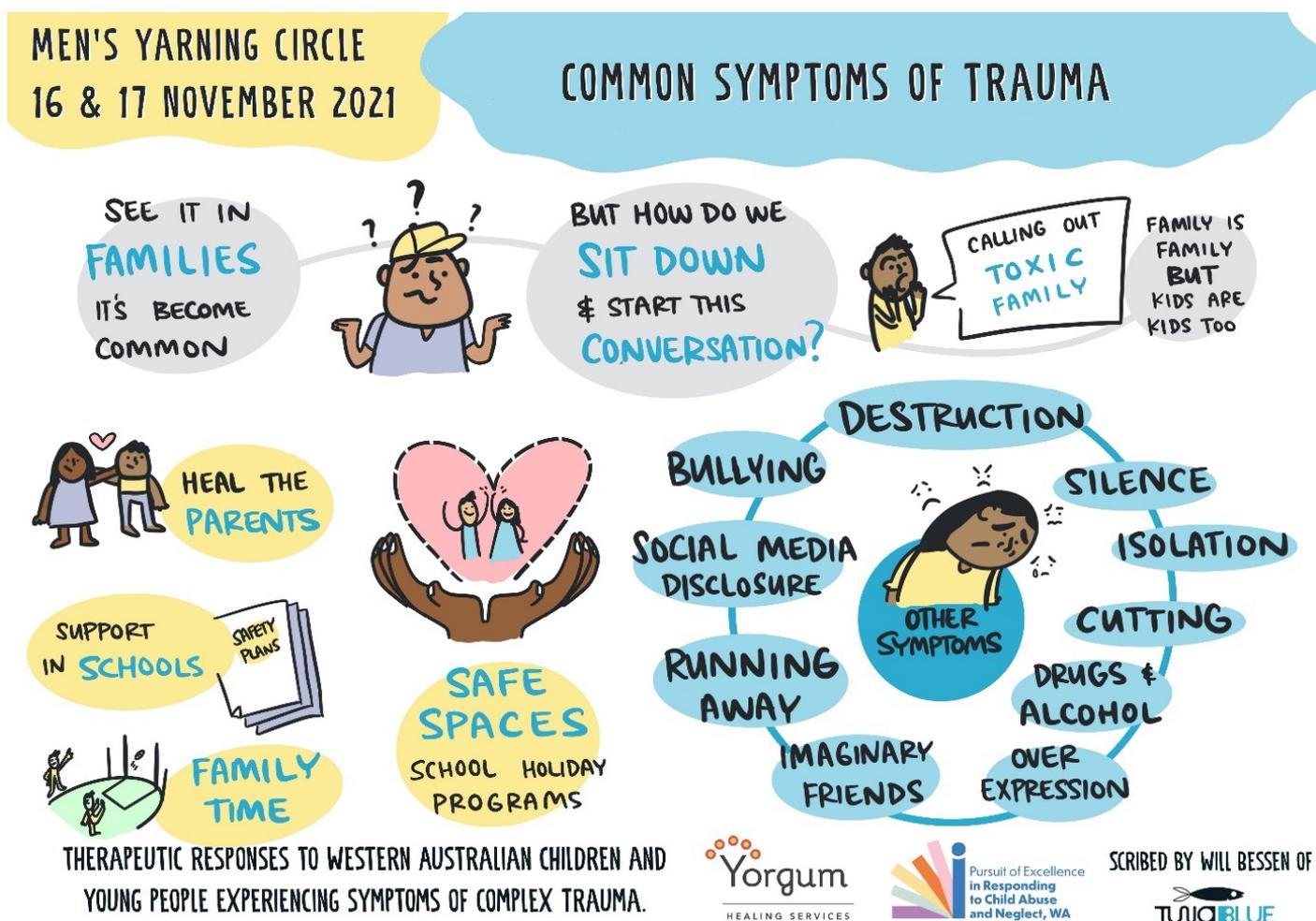
*I think, the kids, when they're traumatised, they also feel that they don't fit in, so that's when they start withdrawing, because they don't have the shoes, they don't have the uniforms even to go to school, so that's where their shame factor comes. They're not good enough, so why would they try? (women's yarning circle)*

*If you look face-to-face, you can see that they're breaking. So, the further they stay away, then no one can notice... sometimes it's good to go to them ones that are isolating. (women's yarning circle)*

*I find with boys that they isolate, so that the females in their family can't identify things that's going on with them. You've got to get to them more often and sit down and yarn with them. Especially single mums. They'll isolate themselves because it's been they've got to be strong, they've got to be this, they've got to be that, and so they isolate so that their immediate family can't see what's going on as well. (women's yarning circle)*

## Secondary theme 15: Imaginary friend

Participants mentioned that some children they observe with complex trauma have an imaginary friend or talk to people who no one else can see. This was particularly for young people who are desperately lonely because they are in out of home care, have been taken off Country and have no access to their kin for company.



## 7.3 What is Healing?

Theme No.	Primary themes	Secondary themes
6.	Self-determination-have a voice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Our mob need to call the shots</li> <li>Family is healing</li> <li>Heal the family to heal the kid</li> <li>Safety and stability</li> <li>Strengths-based approaches</li> <li>On Country programs</li> <li>Restore pride in identity</li> <li>Yarn about racism</li> <li>Education and learning to pass on Kaardtijin and language</li> <li>Positive lifestyles – changing the habits our kids see</li> <li>Teaching our mob to fly</li> </ul>
7.	Country is healing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Grounding</li> <li>Restoring connections to self, land, people and culture</li> <li>Restoring the body's systems</li> <li>Restoring a sense of mastery</li> <li>Access to bush foods and medicines</li> </ul>

In the previous section, participants identified the cause of complex trauma as invasion and ongoing colonisation and the fracturing of the cultural connections which previously kept Noongar people safe and well. In response to complex trauma as a cultural wounding, participants identified culture-based responses as healing.

*I think we all are concerned about our future generations, our children and make sure that they're doing all right. Our grandchildren, make sure they're doing all right. But also, that they're not exposed to the same stuff that we've been exposed to. We want to change that. We want to provide proper cultural healing for our mob.  
(men's yarning circle)*

### Primary theme 6: Self-determination – have a voice

Yarning circle participants emphasised the central importance of Noongar self-determination to healing. Participants wanted strength-based healing approaches that were 'driven by mob', delivered by Noongar community-based organisations and aimed at restoring fractured connections to self, kin, Country and culture.

## Secondary theme 1: Our mob need to call the shots

Participants told us that ‘...proper cultural healing’ for koorlangka and their moort can only be provided by those who have the shared lived experience and knowledge that comes from being part of that culture.

*I think when it comes to healing with our mob it's got to come from us. We need places that are driven by us – because we know how – what our mob need, we know how to work with our mob. (women's yarning circle)*

*So that has to be led by us... We want what's best for our children. (women's yarning circle)*

*because you've been there, you know? I think we're the ones that can actually bring them out, because we can show, well we've been here, that you can do it. (women's yarning circle)*

As part of a healing approach driven by mob, women's yarning circle participants yarned about who should be involved in healing koorlangka.

### Ask koorlangka

*But it would be like putting it back to the child. When you build that relationship and it's trusting to the point like – you know, you'll get a sense of a – like, who's important to you? Who do you – who are you close to? Who do you trust? Who do you normally speak to if something was not right? Okay, well I've identified who the main family members or whatever system is in place here with this kid, let's talk about engaging with these ones because this is the people that this kid trusts. (women's yarning circle)*

### Nannas and other kin

*Nannas if they're around. (women's yarning circle)*

*Their mother, their father, or grandparents, uncle, aunties... it depends on who they stay with, whoever is caring for them. (women's yarning circle)*

*For a therapeutic thing, I think it's main caregivers and close care givers, you know? Usually, it's mum and nan or I'd love to see dads more there. (women's yarning circle)*

### Elders

The women yarned about the important role of Elders in healing, as knowledge holders and leaders in re-establishing cultural protocols or kinship responsibilities where these have been fractured.

*I think elders have a role to play in healing as well. I guess a lot of them are the keepers of the storyline so... but also for the young fellas to kind of – to bring them back to the whole kinship and who's – the structure... respect and that kind of thing. (women's yarning circle)*

*Well, our Elders have just summoned us to deal with a family problem. Aunties have said, we need to talk so we have to now move. We don't want to do it but we have to go and do this for them and that's that protocol because they're Elders. Yeah. I'm sure everyone here has that version of something, Elders sing out and you do... (women's yarning circle)*

## Aboriginal practitioners

Participants also yarned about who the ideal practitioners were to work with koorlangka and their moort.

*Their own mob.*

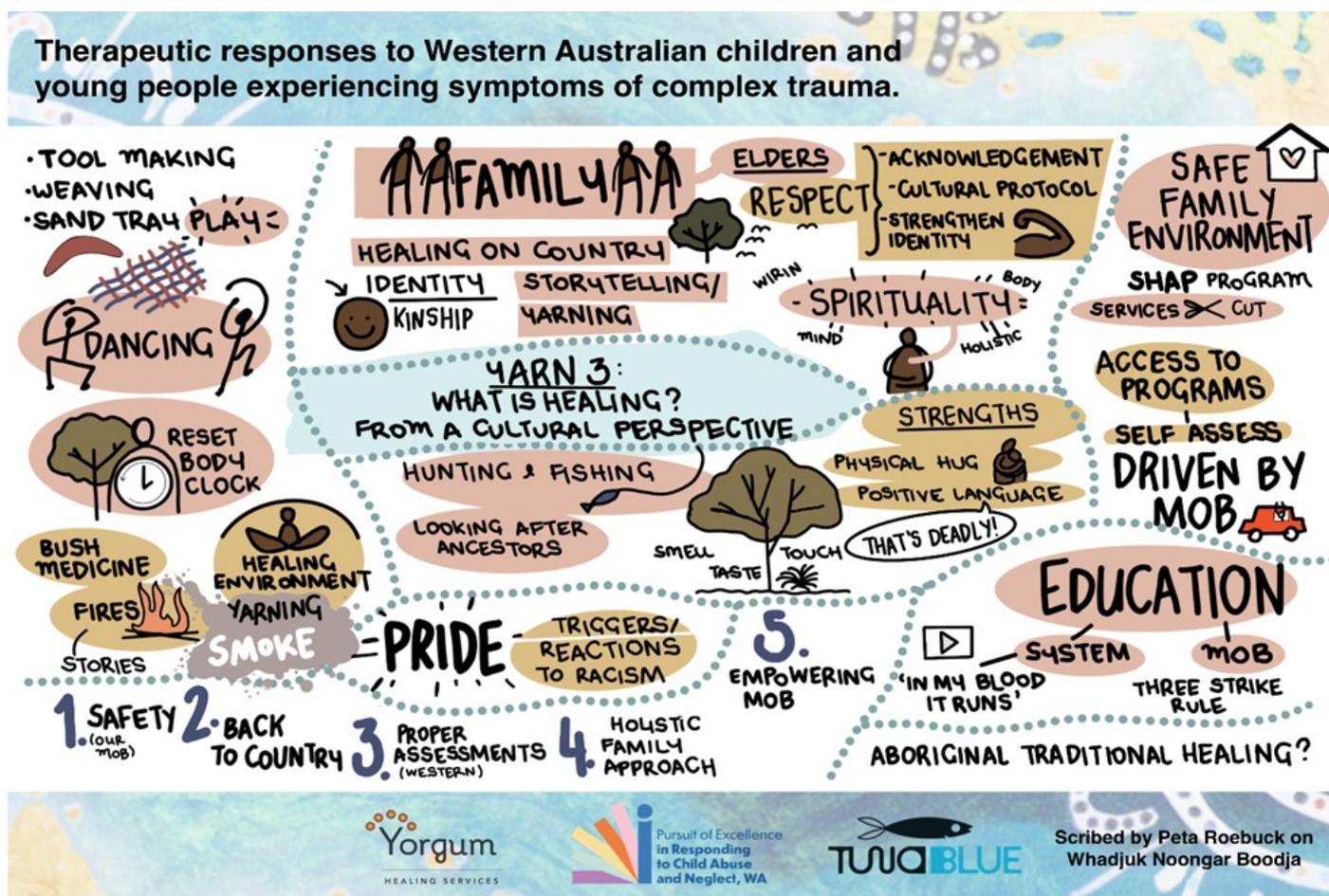
*Us.*

*Straight out.*

*Their own mob, yeah.*

*The way that you know they'll connect with them.*

*And the connection, because you are a part of that connection. (women's yarning circle)*



## Secondary theme 2: Family is healing

The first thing the women's yarning circle identified as healing was family. They told us 'Family is healing'.

*For me, it would be family...Family plays a huge role in healing. If I'm broken, I need my family. My family helps me heal. (women's yarning circle)*

The women spoke about families wanting to support koorlangka to heal. In their subtle manner, they contrast their own experiences of families wanting to help their young people with the deficit view of Aboriginal families that leads some mainstream agencies to discount Aboriginal families and exclude them koorlangka's healing.

*During the day we were doing all this hard healing work and the community we stayed on, they were cooking for us...They were family of the young women and they wanted to support it so they cooked and they let us stay there. Then after all day of yarning and doing healing and hard work, in the evening they had the kids dancing or racing or just entertaining and it was just so lovely to see that those practices are still there. There's positive parenting, like really good things. Not always horrible things. (women's yarning circle)*

## Secondary theme 3: Heal the family to heal the kid

The women's yarning circle observed that when koorlangka show signs of complex trauma, their moorts are also hurting. To heal koorlangka then, is to heal the moort around the child.

*I think the thing is too, it's hard trying to go into that context of, if you're dealing with children and that's showing, is trying to educate those kids around it's okay to express what you're feeling. It's okay to be sad. It's okay to be angry, especially if you come from a home where the learnt behaviour and the patterns of learnt behaviour at the time has been there's not attachment between parents and children because they might have come from a history of trauma themselves and don't know how to express that. So, they pass that down to their kids. But then you struggle to embed that into the children now, because you teach them that and they go home, and if they get shut down at home, it's like, how do you work with the kids but also integrate within the family as a collective, because they all need to be learning and know that it's okay. (women's yarning circle)*

*Empower them. Invest in them mob, family. Come and – put some money in that – in healthy family stuff because that will flow on to the kids, hey. (women's yarning circle)*

The men also yarned about the central role of adult family members in the healing process to break the cycle of intergenerational trauma, saying 'Heal yourself and pass that healing on to your kids..'

Participants also highlighted that although many mainstream practitioners find it hard to engage in holistic family work, it is possible if you do it from a cultural perspective

*I think also it's about how we help a family. If it's done in a cultural way then I think even the older families there is still that opportunity to be able to do that if it's done our way. Going in having a cuppa and having a yarn about whatever it is, to break down those barriers, to get into there and build that relationship is so crucial. (women's yarning circle)*

The women's yarning circle also noted that healing needs to be for all the children in the family, not just the one who has come to the Department's attention.

*Because, I mean, getting referrals for one child and there's six children in the home – what's the point? What's the point of actually working with one child when you've got six others that are experiencing the same thing? (women's yarning circle)*

#### **Secondary theme 4: Safety and stability**

Both men's and women's yarning circles yarned about families needing safety and stability to work through the trauma and how they cannot heal when they are being re-traumatised in their everyday lives. Participants thought it was healing to ensure families could meet their basic housing health and economic needs as a foundational pathway to healing.

*It has to be a safe place, number one. For the family themselves. To flow on to the child. You've got things like poverty, addictions, housing issues so... So, working at those different levels or to address those different issues...It's almost like that's Maslow's hierarchy. You have to do this to address the trauma. (women's yarning circle)*

*The healing can happen but you've got to take care of all of the other stuff underneath it. (women's yarning circle)*

*We can't heal – respond to traumatised children alone. We have to address poverty, housing, invest in the family, that will try and address some of that – helping Aboriginal children that are suffering the trauma and maybe those cycles need to be happening – breaking [unclear] in the home. (women's yarning circle)*

*A holistic approach because with our mob it's not specifically one thing. There's more to it than one thing. If you look at Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, people aren't going to address certain specific needs unless one thing isn't - unless another thing's catered for already. It might be housing but with housing there might be domestic violence, with that there might be DCP so holistic approaches, I think. (men's yarning circle)*

#### **Secondary theme 5: Strengths-based approaches**

The women's yarning circle wanted a healing approach that is strengths-based, that is sensitive to the ways in which Noongar families have been disempowered in both the past and present and engage with families by building on their strengths.

*Give them that sense of – that role and responsibility back to the parents. Encourage them that you are the mum and dad, this is your role and you're doing an amazing job when you do it, you don't need this mob to come and do that for you. You guys have got this. (women's yarning circle)*

*So, focusing on some of the stuff that they are doing okay and saying, for what you've got you're doing a great job but what can we do to help improve that. (women's yarning circle)*

*I would think because it's important to engage families in, I suppose, that same trusting way but also acknowledging the families of – what they're doing right. Regardless to what's going on here you still manage to keep your kids safe to a level of safety. You're still trying. They're going to school. They might not go every day but they're going. (women's yarning circle)*

*They [families] might have a way, it might be different to ours, but we need to respect that and suggest, maybe we'll do this...Especially, if they've been sort of using adaptive behaviour just to try to survive and whatever, so that we understand that. (women's yarning circle)*

A strengths-based approach was also important for working with koorlangka to recognise their resilience.

*...on a personal level for children. Saying you're deadly and moorditch. Look at you, despite everything you've been through, you're here, you're smiling at me. (women's yarning circle)*

## **Secondary theme 6: On Country programs**

A consistent theme across both men's and women's yarning circles was that being out on Country and restoring connections with Country was healing for koorlangka and their moort. Participants across both groups emphasised the need to take families away from the chronic stressors of life so families had space for healing.

*When the kids are in situations where there's no healing, there has to be an intervention to get that child out of that environment and to a place that can be of healing. So, you can't do healing if you're in the household and there's lots going on. But if you remove people from their daily stresses and put them in a healing space, I think that allows for a healing to happen. (women's yarning circle)*

*Maybe the healing is that. So, if you move them into the bush and we did all this wonderful healing work, they're out of that environment, that stressor, taken them out there, they're feeling good. (women's yarning circle)*

For both men's and women's yarning circles, this 'healing space' was consistently described as being out on Country.

*If you're going to do healing with the family it would be good to do it on Country. (women's yarning circle)*

*Connecting to Country (women's yarning circle)*

*Yeah, go camping, yeah to Country (men's yarning circle)*

*Yeah, go back to Country. (men's yarning circle)*

*We found that going out Country, sitting by the ocean and painting was one of the best. (men's yarning circle)*

*You know, going back out country, whether it be shooting, whether it be just camping, combined with some of this stuff, it can only add value. I found that with a lot of the stuff with a lot of my Aboriginal clients. We'd always include some of this stuff in there. (men's yarning circle)*

The men also reflected that supporting families out on Country is part of Noongar culture and has survived into contemporary cultural practice.

*A lot of families do this and they do it really well; they look after the - when young mob have got kids as well, they'll take them on hunting trips or they'll take them camping and just - this bit of kangaroo will go to that mob and there's that sharing and looking after the mob or family I know, anyway. (men's yarning circle)*

## Secondary theme 7: Restore pride in identity

As participants highlighted earlier, one of the key characteristics of complex trauma in the Noongar community has been cultural wounding: the deliberate fracturing of a strong Noongar identity, the fracturing of kinship structures and Noongar peoples' connection to Country. In this context participants wanted cultural healing approaches that could restore these connections and restore pride in identity.

*I think we all are concerned about our future generations, our children and make sure that they're doing all right. Our grandchildren, make sure they're doing all right. But also, that they're not exposed to the same stuff that we've been exposed to. We want to change that. We want to provide proper cultural healing for our mob.  
(men's yarning circle)*

Participants wanted cultural healing to restore pride in identity so koorlangka know who they are, who their mob is.

*I think a lot of it is about connecting to family, connecting to identity and helping them recognise who they are, where they come from and all of that. So, giving them their identity or helping them learn their identity. Then maybe going back through the – through their family lines and going this is who you are. (women's yarning circle)*

*That's who they are; [it] strengthens them. (women's yarning circle)*

Participants yarned about how the restoration of a strong Noongar cultural identity for koorlangka and their moort was also important for re-establishing kinship roles and responsibilities that keep Noongar people safe and well.

*It's like even your identity within your family dynamics. Like I say, culturally, black fella way, everyone has a role within their family structure and even just basic – going back to that basic yarning, black fellas are – we've always been storytellers. That whole narrative in the way that we talk, the way that we share conversations. I think going back to that grass roots level and being sort of open to yarn plays a role in that identity stuff as well.  
(women's yarning circle)*

*I think cultural protocol then gives us that identity of – so where do you sit within the – your family and who you are and...structures. The family structures.  
(women's yarning circle)*

*I think in healing that cultural protocol, it does strengthen us. If we're able to go, this is what you can do and this is what you can't do. It strengthens us as well.  
(women's yarning circle)*

*Is it also something to do with the place? That belonging to Country...or something – it gives you – through the cultural protocols. Like you're saying, you can't speak for other people...but you can.....have a voice on your own Country.  
(women's yarning circle)*

## Secondary theme 8: Yarn about racism

As participants highlighted in previous sections, part of the complex trauma story for the Noongar community was chronic experiences of racism and discrimination. Participants wanted a healing approach that specifically addressed the trauma of racism and empowered koorlangka with coping strategies.

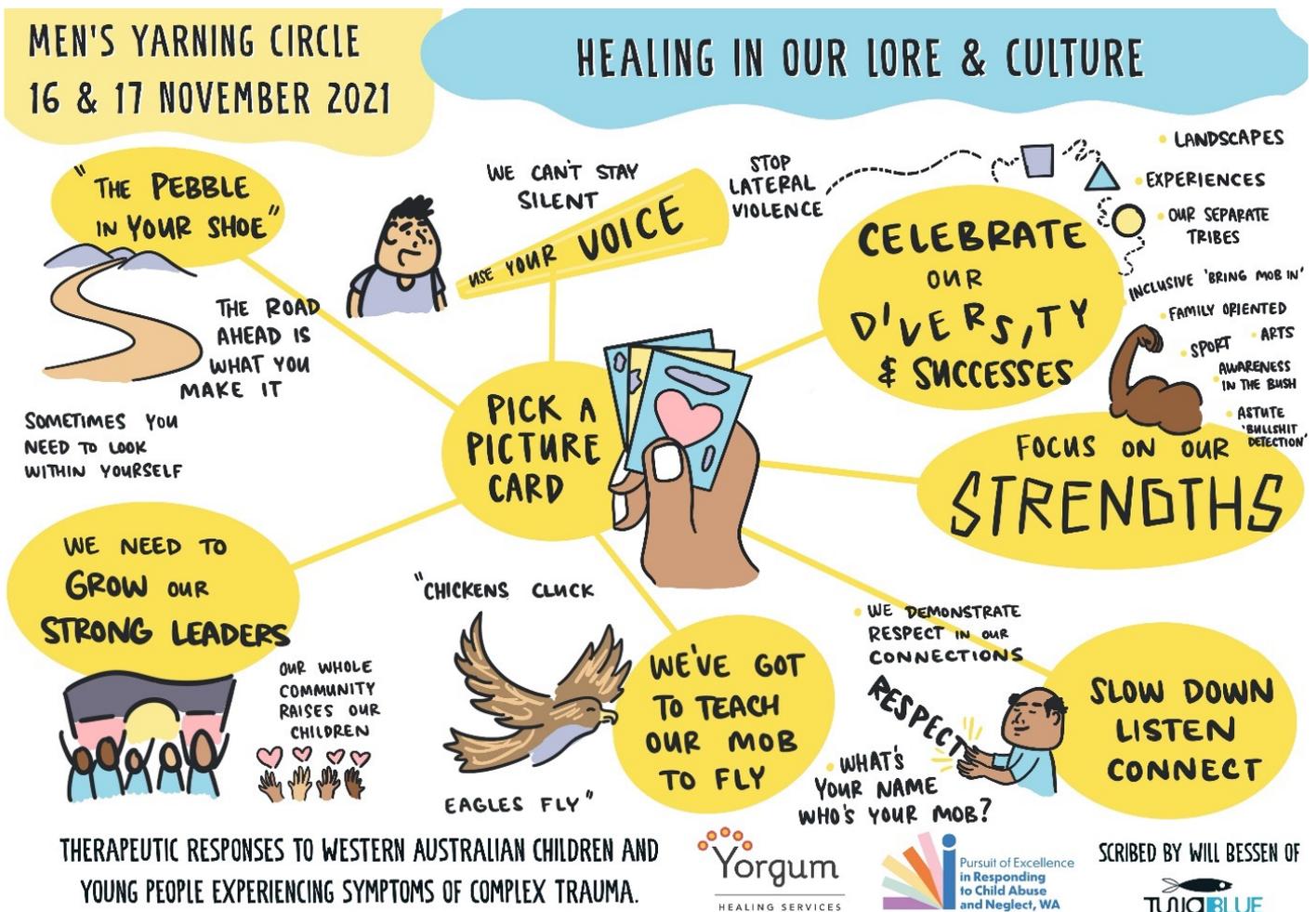
*So part of the healing would be in dealing [with racism] and having mechanisms to be able to address and to cope with those situations...so if we're talking about a child, let's look at how we can help you cope in a situation like that. (women's yarning circle)*

*So making sure that our kids are bulletproof against racist comments and things like that. Sure, they're disgusting - and it does cause hurt - but I think if you become immune yourself to those comments and what they're supposed to do - which is to provoke us and to hurt us. (men's yarning circle)*

*Making sure that whatever we're teaching our children are positive things and practical things they can do to get by because they are going to experience racism. They always do. (men's yarning circle).*

Participants wanted healing approaches that focussed on restoring a strong Noongar identity as protective against the impacts of racial abuse.

*I think we need to grab that pride back and that sense of our resilience because we are still here as a mob and we continue to be here, is to not be so reactive and not give them what they want. That's hard. (women's yarning circle)*



*We can teach them about our mob, our connections, where we're from, their identity, their language, we teach them all that. But it's the outside influences that we need to also teach them as well and help them become strong. Do you think this needs to be part of mainstream healing services, counselling services? Yes. (men's yarning circle)*

*Yeah, and when I mentioned that strengthening, it's also to non-Aboriginal people. If our young fellas had a real strong sense of cultural protocol which is what we've been talking about, then they're able to say, this is where I'm from and this is what our... (women's yarning circle)*

## **Secondary theme 9: Education and learning to pass on Kaardtijin and language**

Closely connected to the theme of restoring a sense of pride in identify is the theme of education and learning. Participants saw this as a central part of a Noongar healing approach so that koorlangka are able to learn who they are and who their mob is.

*What is healing for us and what would that look like? Learning. Yeah, learning. Learning about Culture. Yeah, culture, [unclear], the knowledge to encourage them...So teaching, I think, is a very, very important part of healing and the healing process. (men's yarning circle)*

*Our kids need that learning, the Elders to teach them that knowledge and who they are and all of that. (women's yarning circle)*

Education was seen as important for supporting koorlangka to understand and be proud of their people's achievements.

*When we talk about pre-colonisation and that was 60,000 years, 85,000 years. But there's also evidence to show nearly 120,000 years. We know we've been here a lot longer than that too. We're just waiting for them [fellas] to catch up. Their scientific culture to catch up. But teaching our mob about that sort of stuff. As Nicky was saying, we had our own doctors, we had our own scientists, we had our own engineers, we had – and we never needed for anything. For 1060 generations of people, our people, being here on this land. Now, that's a huge amount. You talk to wadjelas these days and they say, oh, I'm Australian. I'm third generation Australian. My generation, we go back 1060. (men's yarning circle)*

*But teaching that, all of our cultural strengths and our identity and our language and our lore – fair enough a lot of our lore still apply but there's still stuff that we – we still hold dear to and we still cherish and we still teach that. Even if they don't – if it's not there, we can bring it back. So bring all that stuff back and make that apply to everything we teach our kids as well. Because in that 1060 generations, as I said, we never had chronic disease. We never had mental health issues. We led an idyllic life. We lived as one with nature. We were the most healthy, physically, psychologically, physiologically. We were the healthiest then during that 10,000 – 1060 generations. We never had any of the modern-day world problems. (men's yarning circle)*

Participants also yarned about the important role of education in healing by putting the historical context into perspective and identifying colonisation as the source of the problems families face today to address feelings of shame or helplessness in koorlangka.

*Studying and understanding why it happened to our people and just that avoidance around that. And whysome of our people are the way that they are. So fully understanding the impact of what's happened in the past. (men's yarning circle)*

The women's yarning circle yarned about education for healing in the form of information sharing to empower families in the ways they support koorlangka experiencing complex trauma. Specialised information about childhood development and trauma is often held by professionals, but if family and community are to be at the heart of healing, then there needs to be greater sharing of information between professionals and community members who 'may not have that knowledge' (women's yarning circle) but have the love for and relationship with their koorlangka.

The men's yarning circle yarned about passing down of culture and stories to help koorlangka understand the resilience of Noongar people, and therefore their own strength - to 'help the children re-write their own stories' by 'tell[ing] them our stories'. The men also reflected that some families would benefit from strategies for sharing their family stories without exposing koorlangka to more vicarious trauma than they can cope with. As one man explained, his dad, like many survivors of the Stolen Generations was raised by missionaries who abused and neglected the children who were meant to be in their care. He reflected that if his dad had shared the full story of this when he was young, he would have grown up with a 'heart full of anger and hate and all that sort of stuff which leads to stress and anxiety.' (men's yarning circle)

### Secondary theme 10: Positive lifestyles – changing the habits our kids see

The men yarned about healing in terms of adults breaking unhealthy cycles and making positive change in their lives, change so that koorlangka have good role models.

*Change – changing lifestyle and change the way the kids look up at you, how you're living, how you make your choices. Set that example for them. So you're saying looking up at you, becoming a role model (men's yarning circle).*

**MEN'S YARNING CIRCLE**  
16 & 17 NOVEMBER 2021

**HEALING IN OUR LORE & CULTURE**

**LEARNING**

- TWO-WAY KIDS HAVE AS MUCH KNOWLEDGE AS WE DO
- SOCIAL & EMOTIONAL WELLBEING
- ENCOURAGEMENT
- PASSING OUR KAARTIDJIN & LANGUAGE ONTO OUR KIDS
- HEAL YOURSELF & HEAL OTHERS

**LIFESTYLE**

- PREPARE KIDS FOR A WHITE MAN'S WORLD
- CHANGE THE HABITS OUR KIDS SEE
- MAKE OUR KIDS BULLETPROOF
- BUILD THEIR CONFIDENCE

**WHAT DOES HEALING LOOK LIKE?**

**STRESS**

- THINGS BECOME NORMALISED
- CORTISOL STRESS
- MELATONIN SLEEP
- DOPAMINE
- OXYTOCIN
- SEROTONIN
- ENDORPHINS
- GENERATIONS OF FIGHT OR FLIGHT
- ENCOURAGEMENT
- ANYTHING IS POSSIBLE
- YOU CAN HEAL FROM THE PAST

**TELLING STORIES**

- DREAMS
- 1060 GENERATIONS!
- POSITIVE YARNS
- HEALING

Yorgum HEALING SERVICES

Pursuit of Excellence in Responding to Child Abuse and Neglect, WA

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## Secondary theme 11: Teaching our mob to fly

The men's yarning circle wanted a healing approach that encouraged koorlangka to have big dreams and go after them.

*You mentioned your kids before that they're grown up, they're really, really great kids and I know them. Same with our kids. Really good jobs. They're all level headed kids and that sort of message needs to be given to all our kids now that anything's possible. Just put that right support behind them. (men's yarning circle)*

*'Encouragement' (men's yarning circle), 'build their confidence' (men's yarning circle), Anything's possible kind of mentality (men's yarning circle)*

Likewise, the women's yarning circle wanted koorlangka to have role models and mentors in the community to encourage them to achieve high school so they could have greater opportunities.

*ways of healing too is that we have opportunity as Aboriginal people, Torres Strait Islanders, to get in to these spaces now. Our kids have the opportunity to have scholarships, to go to good schools, have good educations that they can learn by. Us as black fellas we can go to uni now. (women's yarning circle)*

## Primary theme 7: Country is healing

As Aboriginal people Country is important. Like when we say who your mob, where you're from, where's your Country. We acknowledge Whadjuk Boodja every time we meet. Country is important. It's a bit of traditional stuff that we've still got.  
(women's yarning circle)

All participants consistently yarned about being on Country as healing for koorlangka and their moort, of being on Country as grounding and a safe place for koorlangka to process trauma, strengthen their identity and kinship systems and restore the body's systems.



## Secondary theme 1: Grounding

Participants across the three yarning circles described one of the therapeutic benefits of being out on Country as 'being grounded', 'being present in space' and bringing people 'back to their body'. Yarning circle participants across the three different yarning circles mention specific cultural activities as grounding, including dancing, tool making, weaving, painting hunting and fishing.

*Well, everything that we know about mindfulness and all that, that's in our culture. We were doing that long before they decided to write that. Going out bush and listening and observing and listening with your heart, your ears, everything, your eyes, they really big listen, that [unclear] stuff and that's also grounding and it de-escalates if you're hyper-aroused. There's so much healing on country that we just don't take advantage of it enough, I don't think. (women's yarning circle)*

*...really get their feet in to country and connect in that really powerful way. Again, it's grounding. You're moving your body. You're dancing to a song and a story. (women's yarning circle)*

*Yeah, and grounding because they're touching. I mean, boomerangs and weaving ... taste, smell, all those things all connect you to that... (women's yarning circle)*

*...if we took kids out bush, you know what kind of – what they're doing in some of the cultural tours is toolmaking, weaving, some of those sorts of things. They're really – they're cultural and they're therapeutic in the way that it's – well, it's mindfulness really, hey? (women's yarning circle)*

*We'd go fishing and spend time at the beach. We would go and sit down on the beach and talk about – or we would go out bush. So, places that they feel culturally secure and grounded and open to talk to about things. I've always found that – they're the best places to go. (men's yarning circle)*

### Cultural Retreat Day

#### WHAT is THERAPEUTIC about ON-COUNTRY PROGRAMS?

- NO TECH
- NO INTERRUPTIONS
- CONNECTION
- CONNECTING MEMORIES
- BEING GROUNDED
- CALMING MIND
- SMELLS in the BUSH
- SIMPLICITY in a COMPLEX WORLD
- ENGAGING the SENSES
- DIGERIDOO 'ROO, SKIN

#### HOW does it WORK?

- ALTERNATIVE NARRATIVE
- STILLNESS
- OPEN MIND and HEART
- BRINGING MOB TOGETHER
- DEVELOPING RESPECT
- CONNECTION to LOCAL LEADERS
- GETTING PERMISSION
- DEEP STILLNESS
- Listening and speaking up!

#### WHAT are some EXAMPLES?

- STAR GAZING
- BUSH WALKING
- COOKING
- BUSH MEDICINE
- NO WASTE
- DANCING
- YARNING
- INCLUDING WHOLE FAMILY
- PAINTING
- SINGING
- FISHING
- CULTURAL PRACTICES & PROTOCOLS

#### WHAT TYPE of WORKFORCE is NEEDED to do this type of WORK? KNOWLEDGE / SKILLS?

- TERTIARY + NON-TERTIARY
- LIVED EXPERIENCE PLAYS a BIG ROLE
- CULTURALLY SAFE
- DIVERSITY
- PATIENCE for STORIES

#### How do we SUPPORT RETENTION of ABORIGINAL WORKERS?

- BEING VALUED
- IMPROVED MARKETING
- INCREASED PAY
- TEAM BUILDING
- UNDERSTANDING FAMILY ROLES and RESPONSIBILITIES
- CULTURALLY ADAPTING
- GOALS and STANDARDS
- MENTORING/ ONGOING TRAINING
- OPPORTUNITY for GROWTH
- CULTURAL SELF-CARE
- CULTURAL LEAVE
- RECONNECTING OURSELVES

Scribed by Peta Roebuck on Whadjuk Yued Noongar Boodja

## Secondary theme 2: Restoring connection to self, land, people, and culture

Women's yarning circle participants spoke about being out on Country as bringing everything into connection and alignment.

*[Being on Country] – just lines you back up, really... Aligning everything (women's yarning circle)*

*It does something to your mind, your body and your spirit. It connects you. Like me going home. It is just 45 minutes down the road but that's my connection to my Country. That's where my family are from. People think, that's only 45 minutes down the road. But it makes a difference when you're there. It does something to you that you just don't – and you feel good. You come back here and, oh gosh, here we go again. We're back here. You feel that lump in your chest. (women's yarning circle)*

Participants in the Yanchep yarning circles observed that being out on Country reinforced a sense of belonging. Following cultural protocols and processes, engaging with kin and Elders, storytelling, cooking, star gazing, making fire, singing and dancing – activities out on Country which strengthened their cultural identity, repaired wirrin (spirit) and connected them themselves, with kin and culture.

Participants of the Yanchep yarning circles spoke about restoring these connections out on Country as therapeutic because it helped Noongar people create an alternative narrative about themselves and their experiences.

## Secondary theme 3: Restoring the body's systems

Both men's and women's yarning circles yarned about being out on Country as healing the impacts of chronic stress on the body's systems by reducing stress, increasing feel good hormones, restoring circadian rhythms for healthy sleep.

*What we're looking at is taking people out of the city and going bush ... So, I guess – and kids in care that possibly is something to do - take them out of that situation and place them somewhere where they can start to de-stress... Because they're in that fight, flight... traumatised in that hyper intensity. So, you want to remove that and you've got to find them a safe space which is out of the environment. Put them somewhere where they can breathe and then be open to healing. (women's yarning circle)*

*What are the opportunities for creating instances where there's no stress? Somebody said on Country trips, earlier. That's a great way of actually reducing stress levels, cortisol levels, but then it also increases other things, other hormones within our bodies. These are the good drugs. Good hormones. Dopamine. Oxytocin, that's a love hormone. Makes us feel good. Serotonin. Endorphins. They're all the stuff that makes us feel good. If we have those feel-good moments on a constant basis it actually counterbalances the stress that cortisol and all that sort of stuff – and helps improve our melatonin as well so we can sleep better at night. Even during the day in some cases. These are the things that we need to make sure that is included in everything that we do. (men's yarning circle)*

*If you get the chance to go bush and you're away from all the light and noise from a city or a town, your body clock gets a chance to reset. You'll often find when the sun goes down you get tired and you want to go to sleep and then when the sun comes up you wake up early and your body clock just gets to reset. (women's yarning circle)*

*Because all of those old traditional ways had physical benefit that they wouldn't have known about but now we know that humming and tapping and singing, all of these things are good for your brain and to relieve stress and relax and things like that. Our mob knew that and were – in another way, I guess, and they practised it. (women's yarning circle)*

For many Aboriginal cultures story telling is at the heart of ceremony, ritual and healing. The women's yarning circle described activities like sitting around the fire together, having a yarn, making damper as healing and soothing.

*Looking at the flames it's soothing*

*It just makes you feel good...something about it, hey...It's beautiful.*

*Sort of like mesmerises you into a sleep or something. Hypnotises you.*

*I suppose that's where the yarning comes from. Just around the fire telling stories.  
(women's yarning circle)*

#### Secondary theme 4: Restoring a sense of mastery

Participants in the Yanchep yarning circles spoke about learning 'life skills' being able to practice 'survival skills' and being able to engage in visual learning and other forms of culturally relevant learning out on Country.

*So, I think our kids can learn from being in the bush and identifying the bush plants and the trees and this is what we used to do in the old days. They had storylines and they had storytelling as well. And you don't have to go far. (Yanchep yarning circle)*

#### Secondary theme 5: Access to bush foods and medicines

The women's yarning circle yarned about the way being out on Country made it possible to able to access healthy bush foods and bush medicines which are important to healing.

*Bush tucker, bush medicine, knowledge. The bush itself. (women's yarning circle)*



## 7.4 What does a healed Koorlang or Moort look like?

Theme no.	Primary themes	Secondary themes
8.	Strong cultural identity is restored	Knowing who you are, feeling complete Knowing about colonisation and its effects Having a voice, being able to express emotion
9.	Family stability and safety is restored	Love and connection Family members understand their roles and responsibilities Families able to pass on Kaardtijin Structure and routine
10.	Hope is restored	Koorlangka are happy, confident and resilient Forgiveness Coming out of survival mode Drive, aiming for bigger things for the next generation

### Primary theme 8: Strong cultural identity is restored

#### Secondary theme 1: Knowing who you are, feeling complete

The participants described a healed child as 'feeling complete' (women's yarning circle), being 'confident about who they are and where they come from', being proud to be Noongar (men's yarning circle), being engaged and feeling a sense of belonging, having a 'solid relationships' and 'connected to family and Booja' (men's yarning circle) having role models and mentors in the community and not comparing themselves to others.

*For young people to know their culture and pride in that. A sense of pride.  
(women's yarning circle)*

*Yeah, just knowing themselves and just stand up for themselves... having respectful, proud, cultural leaders (men's yarning circle)*

#### Secondary theme 2: Knowing about colonisation and its effects

Participants also described a healed child as knowing about colonisation and its effects.

*Knowledge is power. In a way, it applies culturally too doesn't it? You feel good about yourself if you know stuff. Even understanding about colonisation and how the trauma has moved from generation to generation, that's something we need to tell our - well, somewhere we need to teach our children what's going on. Because I can remember when I learned it, it was like a lightbulb went off. I went, oh, that's why they're all down the park getting drunk and fighting. It just made sense. Up until then, I was like, why are we like this? (women's yarning circle)*

### Secondary theme 3: Having a voice, being able to express emotions

Participants spoke about a sign of a child healing would be if they have a voice – if they express their emotions and seek help in healthy ways and if they are connected to people who will listen.

*Maybe if a young person could express themselves and be - if I don't like that or I don't feel happy or something, be able to have enough empowerment and self-esteem to say, I am struggling. I'm in pain. Expressing or, yeah, something like that. Express emotions. (women's yarning circle)*

*...that there's someone there to listen to them, to hear their story and their perspectives and how they're seeing things. Like having a voice is important. (women's yarning circle)*

*If they're feeling down, they open up, they feel comfortable that they can express that as well, without feeling that stigma. (men's yarning circle)*

### Therapeutic responses to Western Australian children and young people experiencing symptoms of complex trauma.



Scribed by Peta Roebuck on Whadjuk Noongar Boodja

## Primary theme 9: Family stability and safety is restored

### Secondary theme 1: Love and connection

Participants spoke about koorlangka being surrounded by moort and having love and connection in their lives as an indicator of healing.

*There's that togetherness as well. They don't feel all stressed out so then - and then they feel that - being able to come to the family with their problems and any issues they got. Yeah, support each other and the family's more open with their feelings with each other, so showing love, showing that affection. (men's yarning circle)*

*Be able to do normal family things that most kids would expect and have someone who feels comfortable giving them a hug. To show through that physical contact that they love and care about them. (women's yarning circle)*

*Being acknowledged, praised. I guess that connecting, that connection. I think that thing about hugs. I keep on coming back to experiencing that feeling of being loved through a hug. (women's yarning circle)*

### Secondary theme 2: Family members understand their roles and responsibilities

Yarning circle participants felt that a sign of a healing family was a family where members understood their family roles and responsibilities and had the freedom to exercise these roles and responsibilities without constant surveillance from government agencies. A healed family was one that could access Noongar community controlled dispute resolution services and where the trauma cycle was ended. The women's yarning circle linked this with creating safety for koorlangka.

*Happiness from a child's perspective is no alcohol or drugs in the house. No domestic violence. (women's yarning circle)*

### Secondary theme 3: Families are able to pass on kaartijin and language

The men's yarning circle described a healing family as one who was able to pass kaartijin and language down to koorlangka.

*Being able to pass our kaartijin and language onto our kids...and us learning it we can talk to each other in our language - that's where I want to get to, anyway (men's yarning circle).*

### Secondary theme 4: Structure and routine

Yarning circle participants yarned about a healed family as a family where there is structure and routine for koorlangka.

*There's structured routine. You know, you get them into a structured routine, they tend to act and behave different. They're not up all night. You're supporting them. (men's yarning circle)*

*Our kids just want a family that's safe and they do normal things. Go to bed, go for food. (women's yarning circle)*

## Primary theme 10: Hope is restored

### Secondary theme 1: Koorlangka are happy, confident and resilient

Then men described a healed child as 'happy and excited by life', 'resilient to keep pushing on', 'mindful of right and wrong' and able to set boundaries and say 'no'.

## MEN'S YARNING CIRCLE 16 & 17 NOVEMBER 2021

# WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE WHEN OUR CHILDREN HAVE HEALED FROM TRAUMA?

**HAPPY**  
EXCITED BY LIFE

**RESILIENT**  
TO KEEP PUSHING ON  
WE SHOULDN'T HAVE TO DEAL WITH THE TOUGH TIMES THOUGH  
BOUNCE BACK

**CONFIDENT**  
ABOUT WHO THEY ARE AND WHERE THEY'RE FROM  
PROUD  
NOONGAR

**SETTING BOUNDARIES**  
CONSENT  
"NO"  
BOUNDARIES  
KINDNESS NOT ABUSED

**SEEKING HELP**  
ACKNOWLEDGE THE PAST  
SEEKING PATHWAYS TO CHANGE

**CONNECTED**  
SOLID RELATIONSHIPS  
FAMILY BOODJA

**MINDFUL**  
RIGHT WRONG

**DRIVEN**  
AIMING BIGGER FOR THE NEXT GENERATION  
EHTAPE

HEALING IN  
• HOMES  
• SERVICES  
• ON-COUNTRY

THERAPEUTIC RESPONSES TO WESTERN AUSTRALIAN CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE EXPERIENCING SYMPTOMS OF COMPLEX TRAUMA.

Yorgum HEALING SERVICES

Pursuit of Excellence in Responding to Child Abuse and Neglect, WA

SCRIBED BY WILL BESSEN OF Tjua Blue

### Secondary theme 2: Forgiveness

Participants spoke about being able to forgive and show compassion for yourself as an important sign of healing.

*Pretty much being at peace with yourself. Forgiving the roads that you took, I guess, to cope with your trauma but forgiving yourself that it's okay to - what you've done and accepting who are and forgiving everything around you really and just going in peace. Not leaving it behind, of course, but you've healed and moved, shifted a bit. (women's yarning circle).*

### Secondary theme 3: Coming out of survival mode

The women's yarning circle yarned about children and families coming out of survival mode, of their children achieving high school so they can have opportunities in life, to get out of poverty. The men's yarning circle yarned about a healing family being able to make plans for the future, beyond survival mode.

*You need a bit of a plan, too, eh? To go, this is what we need to do. So, you need to have that conversation around that with your family, or a family, so this is what we're going to do. We want to make sure our kids have this, these opportunities for structure, routine, for happiness, for love and supportive, togetherness. The plan is, we're going to be much happier, we're going to be much - confident and outgoing and we want to make sure that these things here are available as well. (men's yarning circle)*

### Secondary theme 4: Drive, aiming for bigger things for the next generation

The men's yarning circle described a healed child as one who could dream that 'anything is possible', is driven, and aiming for bigger for the next generation.

**MEN'S YARNING CIRCLE**  
16 & 17 NOVEMBER 2021

**THE A - Z OF HEALING**

ACCEPTANCE  
calmer  
ENGAGED  
FAMILY  
IDENTITY  
KINSHIP  
MOTIVATION  
BELONGING  
DREAMING  
goals  
HAPPY  
JOBS  
LOVE  
NICE  
open Hearted  
PROUD  
RESILIENT  
SMART  
TRUST  
understanding  
VITALITY  
Warmth  
YARNING  
ZEST

THERAPEUTIC RESPONSES TO WESTERN AUSTRALIAN CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE EXPERIENCING SYMPTOMS OF COMPLEX TRAUMA.

Yorgum  
HEALING SERVICES

Pursuit of Excellence  
in Responding  
to Child Abuse  
and Neglect, WA

SCRIBED BY WILL BESSEN OF  
TWABLUE

## 8. Project limitations and directions for future research

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### Generalisability

This research project documented Noongar community conceptualisations of trauma, complex trauma and healing in the Noongar community in Perth, WA. The broad finding that Noongar experiences of abuse and neglect related trauma have their origins in collective, historical, cultural and community trauma arising from invasion and ongoing colonisation is consistent with existing literature documenting the experiences of First Nations peoples living in colonised lands around the world. However, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and communities are diverse, they have their own voices, perspectives and healing knowledges and as such these findings in this report should not be generalised to other cultural groups.

Our approach to place-based, Aboriginal-led co-design, however could be used as a basis for future research with Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander communities who want to facilitate yarning about complex trauma and healing and document a framework for healing in their community.

### Regional and remote community perspectives

Due to Covid-19 restrictions on conducting new research in many regional and remote Aboriginal communities in WA, we were unable to document regional or remote perspectives on complex trauma. Now that Covid-19 restrictions have been removed, a future co-design led by a regional Aboriginal community and a remote Aboriginal community is needed. A regional and remote co-design can help inform service design for Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations and government procurement practices in those regions, as well as for urban areas where children from regional and remote areas are residing.

### Young people's perspectives

The research team felt it was important to include the voices of koorlangka in the co-design. Given the project timeframes and available resources, we made the decision not to apply for ethics approval for research with young people, but to wait until we could meaningfully include koorlangka at all levels of the co-design and ensure their experience is positive and empowering.

### Effective co-design needs to centre Aboriginal knowledges, ways of knowing, ways of working and ways of being in the world.

The decision to pivot the co-design and put Aboriginal communities at the heart was ultimately the right decision. However, the reality of retrofitting an Indigenous research methodology onto an established Western frame was not ideal.

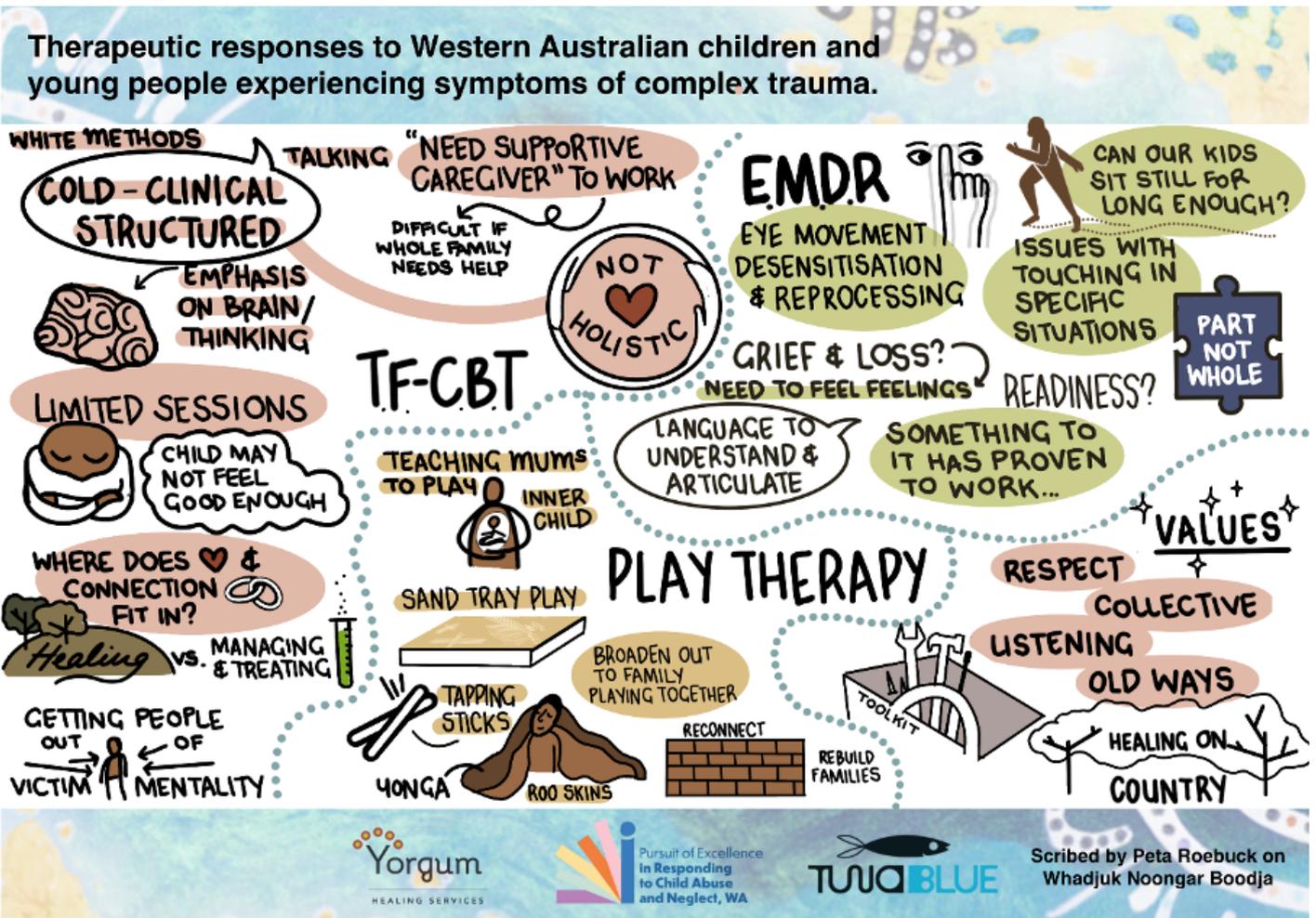
For research to be genuinely Aboriginal-led, Aboriginal communities must have the opportunity to exercise leadership over the earliest stages of the research. In this way, funding proposals, budgets and research design can reflect community priorities and are better able to meet the community's need for evidence.

In this research project, the relationship with Yorgum was negotiated after PERCAN activities had already commenced which meant the community was not involved in establishing the project parameters.

PERCAN had already committed substantial resources engaging non-Indigenous clinical psychologists and producing systematic reviews of Western treatments for PTSD. As a result, the initial approach to co-design was heavily influenced by the idea of bringing together the best available Western evidence with Aboriginal knowledges.

Due to the nature of colonisation itself, the academic literature on Aboriginal healing approaches is sparse in comparison to the Western evidence base and the Western evidence base frames trauma in ways that many Aboriginal scholars reject. Therefore the idea that the co-design was bringing together the best available Western evidence about what works for complex trauma with Aboriginal knowledges of healing was consistently challenging. PERCAN had already committed substantial resources meeting with Western treatment developers in the US, engaging non-Indigenous clinical psychologists and producing systematic reviews of Western treatments for PTSD before the pivot. This evidence was shared with yarning circle participants in a series of videos on Western concepts of trauma and Western therapies/therapeutic techniques such as TF-CBT, EMDR and Play therapy.

The yarning circle participants were highly critical of the form and content of the Western evidence videos and apart from some interest in the EMDR video, participants did not feel these approaches were very relevant to the ways in which complex trauma was experienced in their community, and their views on healing from that trauma from a Noongar perspective.



Participants did not necessarily want or need to learn more about Western therapeutic approaches. They needed truth-telling about the dynamics of complex trauma in their communities and the opportunity to articulate what they know to be healing for their families. A more helpful way of bringing Western evidence together with Aboriginal knowledge in the future should be influenced by a 'living archive' or 'third archive approach' (Neale and Kelly 2020). This approach foregrounds Aboriginal knowledges and recognises what Aboriginal peoples have been saying clearly and over a long period of time – that they have their own vast stores of evidence about what works and what does not. Future co-design in this area could first ask:

1. What are the main priorities for your community?
2. What have you always known works for your people in terms of addressing these particular priorities?

Then ask:

3. Are there Western technologies or evidence that could contribute toward greater recognition of this knowledge so your community can get on with the work you need to do?

Western technologies in this case may simply mean recording and transcribing yarning circles to translate Aboriginal knowledges into forms of evidence that Western institutions and funders can more readily recognise. Useful evidence in this case could include:

- ◆ What does neuroscience say about the impact of chronic or repeated experiences of racism on the brain?
- ◆ From a Western perspective, what is the impact of intergenerational trauma on the mind and body?
- ◆ What does the international literature say about connection to culture and resilience?
- ◆ How is neuroscience catching up with Aboriginal knowledge about the therapeutic benefits of being on Country?

The lesson for future research is that authentic co-design with communities must include those communities at all stages, from the very beginning conceptual phases, through the design, development, implementation, analysis, validation, reporting and dissemination stages.

Effective co-design needs to recognise and honour Aboriginal knowledges, ways of knowing, ways of working and ways of being in the world. It is of critical importance to centre these perspectives in any future research with Aboriginal communities.

Researchers must create safe spaces in research methods for Aboriginal voices to be heard, such as through yarning circles led by Aboriginal researchers in places of significance to research participants, with enough time available to yarn, and involving ceremony where-ever possible and appropriate.

## **Data sovereignty for Aboriginal community partners must be central to partnership arrangements**

The experiences of this project demonstrate the need for universities to improve their processes, structures and supports to enable and normalise respect for Indigenous data sovereignty in its research. When it came to partnering with Yorgum, the ACCP team found the university did not have contract templates that were compliant with Indigenous data sovereignty and governance principles. The research team drafted cultural and intellectual property clauses into the existing contracts to recognise the Noongar communities as owners of their own data.

While this project was not originally designed as an Aboriginal-focused project, the process of working together with an ACCO and a non-Indigenous institution also reinforced the importance of non-Indigenous service providers, researchers and academics having clear boundaries about not applying for service or research funding in spaces where Aboriginal organisations and experts are already well established.

## **Building the evidence base around complex trauma**

Routinely including Aboriginal ways of being, doing and knowing into broader conversations around complex trauma is likely to significantly advance therapeutic responses to complex trauma more broadly. After all, if complex trauma, at its core, refers to the consequences of chronic and repeated trauma which is interpersonal in nature and occurs from the earliest stages of child development, who better to tell this story than communities who have been resisting colonisation for hundreds of years? If complex trauma involves healing the fragmented self, restoring connections and a sense of belonging, who better to tell us about healing than communities who are seeking out their kin, restoring their cultural connections and reawakening ceremony and lore?

## 9. Conclusion



The results of this research emphasise that Noongar cultures, systems and structures were sophisticated and helped keep koorlangka, families and communities safe, wherein they enjoyed a strong sense of health and wellbeing on their country. Despite the profound impacts of colonisation and intentional destruction of Noongar systems and structures, Noongar people are resilient and express strong connections to their culture and their country. They share deep understandings of their people's experiences of historical and cultural trauma across time, and based on these understandings, have solutions about how their people may become healed from these traumas.

This report has provided insights into Noongar community conceptualisation of complex trauma, priority solutions, and a framework of non-negotiable, minimum requirement principles to guide healing work with koorlangka and their families who experience complex trauma.

We hope the report and the framework will be useful for community members and their community organisations as well as funders of healing and therapeutic services in the Noongar community.

The report has also provided a methodology for genuinely Aboriginal-led co-design which other communities could adapt and refine in order to document their own healing frameworks that are meaningful according to their diverse experiences and cultural templates.

## Appendix A: A Noongar framework for healing

Based on the results of the co-design process with Noongar participants the research team developed a Noongar framework for koorlangka healing from complex trauma. This framework is comprised of a set of fundamental, minimum requirement, non-negotiable principles for koorlangka healing, as a direct response to the profound historical and cultural wounding that has occurred as a result of colonialism across time: the violent dispossession and disempowerment of Noongar people, and the deliberate fracturing of a strong Noongar identity, the fracturing of family and kinship structures and Noongar peoples' connection to Country. The framework should not be viewed in isolation from the important contextual information and voices of the Noongar community presented in the full report.

### Self-determination

Noongar koorlangka, their moort and their needs are front and centre in any responses to the trauma they experience – “nothing about us, without us”. (women’s yarning circles)

Programs and responses are developed using language koorlangka and their moort can understand and incorporates Noongar language “... give the clients back the language”. (women’s yarning circles)

### Community-controlled

Community-controlled organisations have a unique relationship with and place in the Noongar community. They are viewed as providing culturally safe, skilled Aboriginal workers and culturally safe environments for healing koorlangka and their moort.

### Culture-based responses

Responses are based on Noongar Lore and Culture, Noongar cultural frameworks, knowledge systems, family and kinship systems, and ways of working, e.g., on-Country programs.

### Safety and stability

Being safe and having some form of stability in life is essential so Noongar koorlangka and their families can do the work of healing, enjoy a sense of wellbeing, and have a good quality of life.

### Identity

Having a strong identity and connection to culture, country, family, and community are important parts of Noongar healing. They help koorlangka and their families to know who they are, who they are connected to, and where they fit in the Noongar world.

### Holistic responses

Noongar people see the world holistically, the interconnectedness of all parts of their lives, and the ripple effects of trauma across time, families, and their communities. Responses need to be holistic to meet the holistic needs of Noongar koorlangka and their moort, to heal from trauma. A “... holistic family approach” is needed. Responses must also “... heal everyone, even the perpetrator”. (men’s and women’s yarning circles)

## **Strengths-based**

Using a strengths-based approach to healing is essential. Despite the ongoing negative portrayals of Aboriginal people in the media and in data collected by governments, Noongar people recognise the strengths that exist within their families and communities, which can provide the foundations for healing and pride in identity.

## **Family**

Investing in families to promote love, respect, and connection within families, and to provide information and skills about healthy relationships and parenting, can help Noongar koorlangka and their moort to heal and to break cycles in empowered ways, "... heal the parents". (men's and women's yarning circles).

## **Education**

Education can lead to opportunities for successful lives so koorlangka and their moort can come "... out of survival mode". Education can support koorlangka to walk proudly in two worlds (Noongar and Western), strong in their identity and culture, "... knowledge is power", "... we've got to teach our mob to fly", "... to dream ... anything is possible". (men's and women's yarning circles)

## **Empowerment**

Having information about cultural knowledge and practices, kinship, roles and responsibilities, issues such as trauma, its impacts on their people, strategies and skills for helping and supporting healing, parenting, communicating effectively and sensitively, identifying and expressing feelings, building motivation and resilience, and healthy lifestyles and relationships, are important to Noongar people, their koorlangka and their moort, so they can feel confident and empowered when faced with daily challenges including walking in two worlds (Noongar and Western), "... don't assume mob can't do it". (men's and women's yarning circles)

## **Aboriginal/Noongar workers**

Noongar workers bring to their work shared lived experiences with their community. They also bring shared and deep understandings of the issues their community faces, and are best placed to respond appropriately, "... employ our mob ... not just one person to burn out". (women's yarning circles)

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